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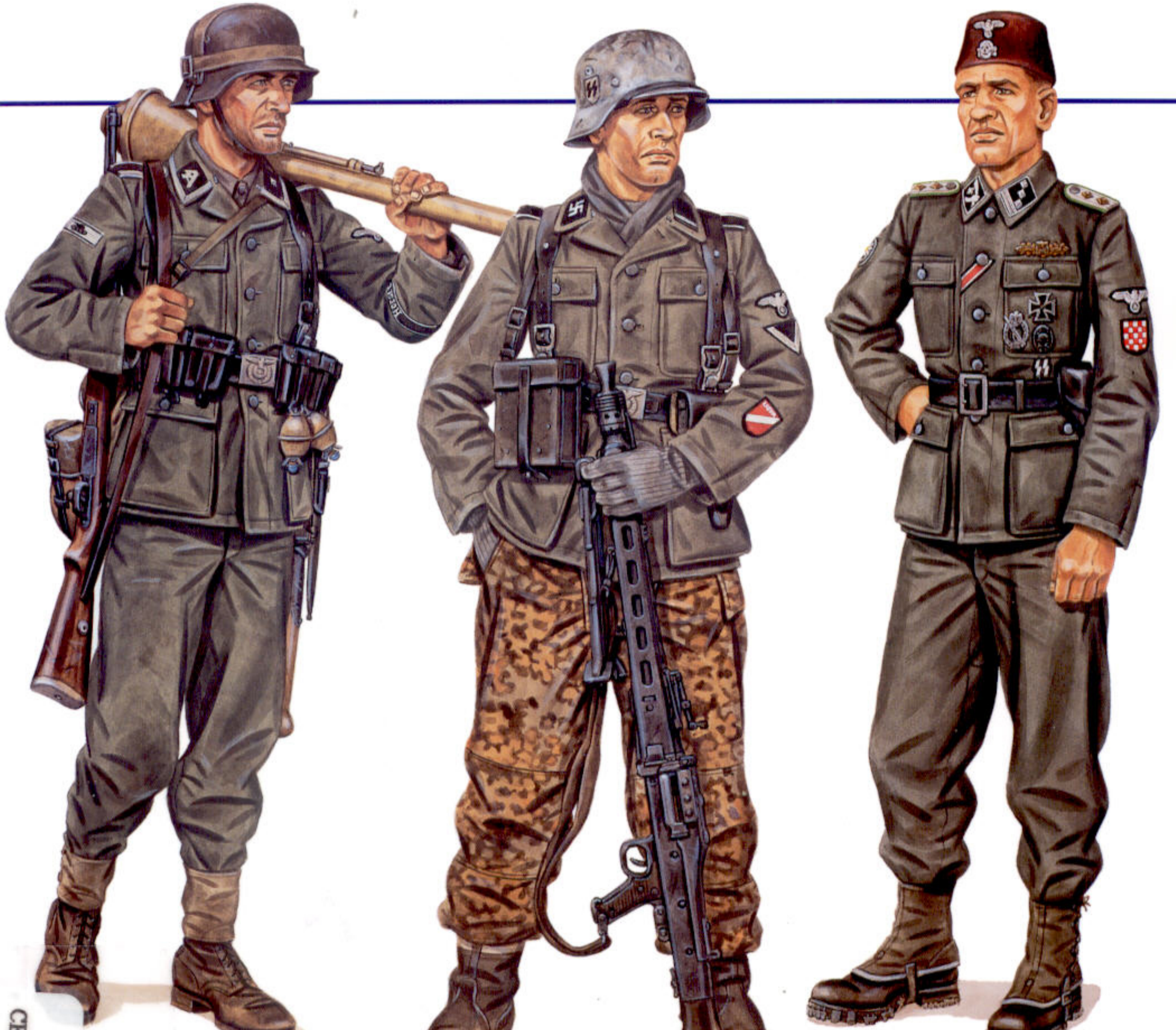
The Waffen-SS (3)

11. to 23. Divisions



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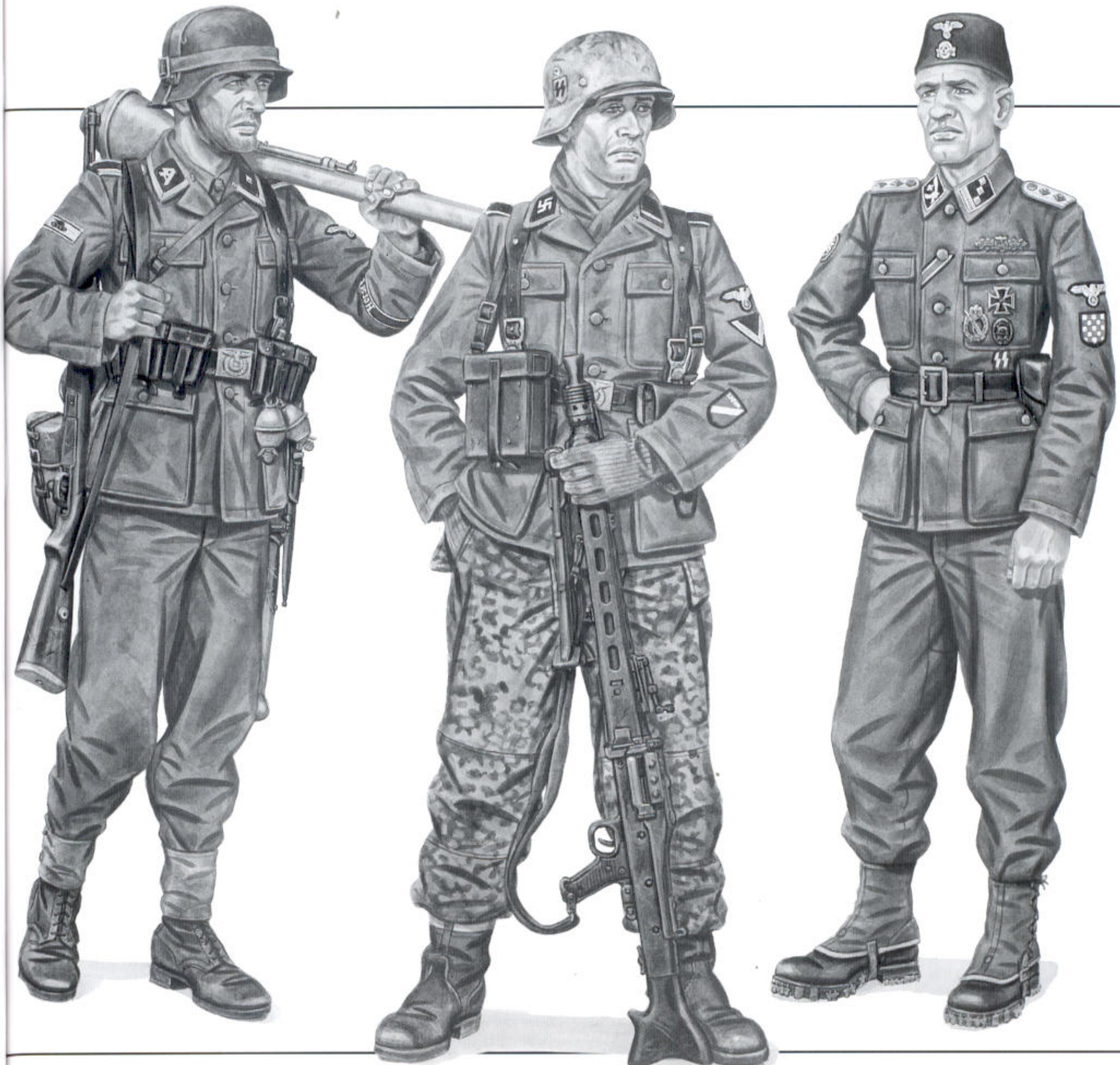

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Author's Note

The historical background of the military units of the *Schutz Staffeln* or SS – the National Socialist Workers' Party's political security organization – is briefly described in the introduction to the first title in this sequence, MAA 401, *The Waffen-SS (1): 1. to 5. Divisions*. Similarly, general explanations of Waffen-SS rank structures and titles, and of universal uniform and insignia practice, will be found in MAA 401 and are not repeated here.

Beginning each divisional section in this text is a list of **commanders**, whose **ranks** differ. Conventionally, a division was a command for a major-general (SS-Brigadeführer, abbrev. SS-Brigaf) or a lieutenant-general (SS-Gruppenführer, SS-Gruf). Occasionally, especially towards the end of the war when many formations were grossly understrength, command would be held by more junior ranks: brigadier (SS-Oberführer, SS-Oberf), colonel (SS-Standartenführer, SS-Staf) or even lieutenant-colonel (SS-Obersturmbannführer, SS-Ostubaf).

The listings of **principal elements** of each division are abridged. Only main combat units are given – in the order infantry, tank/armoured assault gun, anti-tank, artillery, anti-aircraft, reconnaissance and engineer. All divisions included a range of additional support and service units, almost invariably identified by the divisional number.

After Oct 1943 **infantry regimental numbering** was rationalized throughout the W-SS, with sequential numbers irrespective of exact unit designation – e.g. SS-PzGren Regts 25 & 26 in 12. SS-Pz Div *Hitlerjugend* were followed by SS-W GebJr Regts 27 & 28 in 13. W Geb Div der SS *Handschar*, and so on. The regimental numbers cited here are generally those of the 1943–45 sequence.

Units raised from foreign personnel often bore several different numbers and titles, sometimes over short periods and only patchily documented, before the definitive style was settled in 1944; in this text there is usually only space to list the final forms. For detailed analysis of such questions, annotated to German documentary sources, readers are directed to such reference works as Bender & Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization & History of the Waffen-SS*, Vols 3-5 (Mountain View, California, 1972-82).

Artist's Note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

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THE WAFFEN-SS (3) 11. to 23. DIVISIONS

One of the first foreign volunteer units to reach the Russian Front, in winter 1941/42, was the *Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande*. This volunteer wears the German field-grey M1941 tunic, with a version of the arm shield in Dutch national colours below the eagle on his left sleeve, and one of the crudely-lettered early pattern 'Legion Niederlande' cuffbands (see Plate H1). Other men in the uncropped photo display the vertical 'Wolfsangel' rune on the right collar patch. (Private collection)

INTRODUCTION

IN 1941 THE BATTLEFIELD PROWESS of the original SS divisions on the Russian Front prompted their expansion. Limited in his ability to compete with the other three armed services for German ('Reichsdeutsche') conscripts, the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, at first redesignated and retrained security personnel of the *Totenkopfstandarte* ('Death's Head Regiments') as combat troops. The constant need for recruits, both to replace battle casualties and to police the enormous areas coming under German occupation, then led Himmler and his recruitment chief, SS-Ogruf Gottlob Berger, to explore two main sources of manpower outside the borders of the Reich.

The first were non-German but acceptably 'Germanic' volunteers from the occupied countries of North-West Europe, who initially proved themselves in the ranks of the *Wiking* Division in 1941 (see MAA 401). The Waffen-SS continued to recruit there; the survivors of the original regimental-size volunteer 'legions' of 1941–42 were later rebuilt into brigades in 1943; and finally into (at least nominal) divisions in 1944, although this involved adding recruits from various other more or less arbitrary sources.

The Kommandostab RF-SS and Western volunteer legions

Distinct from the Waffen-SS divisions, which served at the front under the command of Army higher formations, Himmler retained under his own control SS combat units designated *Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS*. Deployed behind the front lines in Russia in 1941–42 on 'anti-partisan' duties, this force consisted of one cavalry and two motorized infantry brigades; the former later evolved into the 8. SS-Kavallerie Division *Florian Geyer* (see MAA 404). The infantry brigades initially consisted of former *Totenkopfstandarten* redesignated as 'SS infantry regiments': 1. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) with SS-Inf Regts 8 & 10, and 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) with SS-Inf Regts 4 & 14. These brigades were used as a pool of replacements for the front line divisions; and it was under their control that the first foreign SS volunteer legions were introduced to active service.

In April 1941 some 2,500 Dutch and Flemish-Belgian volunteers were formed into Freiwilligen Standarte Nord-West ('Volunteer Regiment North-West'). By early autumn the Freikorps Danmark and Freiwilligen Legion Norwegen were raised in Scandinavia. The 'Nord-West' regiment was divided into the Frw Legion Flandern and Frw Legion Niederlande in September. After training, the Flandern and Niederlande legions joined the 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) behind the Leningrad front in midwinter 1941/42, followed in February 1942 by the Norwegian Legion. In May

1942 the Freikorps Danmark arrived at the front and was temporarily attached to the 3. SS-Division *Totenkopf;* subsequently the 1. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) took over the Norwegian and Danish legions.

Baltic, Balkan and Eastern volunteers

When the Wehrmacht drove the Soviet Red Army from the Baltic nations of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1941, these also offered a particularly promising recruiting ground.

The second source of manpower after racially 'Germanic' volunteers was a range of 'Volksdeutsche' – men of distant German descent, from communities in the border provinces of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. Units raised both from Germanic and Volksdeutsche recruits were normally designated *SS-Freiwilligen* ('SS Volunteer'), and in many cases they were given national emblems on the right hand collar patch – although in practice many wore the standard SS-runes. To these 'ethnic Germans' were later added blatantly non-Germanic recruits from the Balkans and occupied Soviet Union. Such formations were designated *Waffen Divisionen der SS* ('Armed Divisions of the SS') in 1944, to distance them from the original Reichsdeutsche of the plain 'SS Divisions' and the racially acceptable 'SS Volunteers'; apart from their German cadres, these units were forbidden to display the SS-runes. Of uneven combat value, some of them were limited to 'anti-partisan' duties in the rear areas.

Thirdly, 1943 saw a second series of armoured divisions (9., 10. & 12.) raised from ever younger Reichsdeutsche conscripts, led by cadres of veteran officers and NCOs posted from the senior divisions. All three of these classes of formation are represented in this third title in our sequence. The Waffen-SS as a whole earned a dual reputation, both for remarkable aggression and stamina in combat, and for murderous atrocity against civilians and prisoners. As throughout these Men-at-Arms titles, this book is concerned solely with brief, factual organization and campaign histories of the separate divisions, and the evolving uniforms, insignia and equipment of their officers and men.

THE DIVISIONS: 11. SS-FREIWILLIGEN PANZER-GRENADIER DIVISION *NORDLAND*

Designations

March 1943	11. (germanische) SS-Panzergrenadier Division
November 1943	11. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Division *Nordland*

Commanders

Mar–May 1943 SS-Brigadeführer Franz Augsberger; *May 1943–July 1944* SS-Gruppenführer Fritz von Scholz; *July 1944–Apr 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Joachim Ziegler; *Apr–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Dr Gustav Krukenberg

Principal elements (1944)

SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 23 *Norge* (norwegisches Nr. 1); SS-Panzer-grenadier Regiment 24 *Danmark* (dänisches Nr. 1); SS-Panzer Abteilung (Sturmgeschütz) 11 *Hermann von Salza;* SS-Panzerjäger Abeilung 11;

SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 11; SS-Flak Abteilung 11; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 11; SS-Panzer Pionier Bataillon 11 (unconfirmed sources also list an SS-Jäger Regiment 11, and SS-Werfer Bataillon 521)

Campaigns

The origins of the *Nordland* Division can be traced to January 1943, when Himmler and Gottlob Berger reshaped the Northern European element in the Waffen-SS. After the initial surge of volunteers, slower recruiting made it difficult to keep the individual national legions up to strength. It was planned to bring them together to create a division, and to twin it with 5. SS-Pz Div *Wiking* in a new 'Germanic Armoured Corps' – III (germanisches) SS-Panzer Korps. The formation of the new 11. Division was put in hand in March–July 1943 at the Gräfenwöhr training area; the nucleus was the existing *Nordland* Regiment transferred from the *Wiking* Division, and the Frw Legion Norwegen and Freikorps Danmark. Originally it was intended to include a third regiment based on the Frw Legion Niederlande, but later that the Dutch should form a separate *Nederland* Brigade within III (germ.) SS-Panzer Korps. The divisional commander, SS-Brigaf Fritz von Scholz, was the former commander of the *Nordland* Regiment.

Since many of the personnel were combat veterans, training was completed by August 1943. The *Nordland* Division was sent into action that September in northern Croatia, to help counter Tito's Communist partisans. Following the Italian armistice of that month, it also helped to disarm the Italian 57th 'Lombardia' Division. In late November the division left Croatia for the northern Russian Front, assigned to 18. Armee; at this point it numbered just under 11,500 men.

On 14 January 1944 the Oranienbaum sector on the Gulf of Finland was struck by the Soviet 2nd Shock Army, outnumbering the defending German forces by four to one. The first German units to feel the brunt of the attack crumpled almost immediately, leaving *Nordland* in a precarious position. The division held on tenaciously, and elements of the *Norge* Regiment even launched counter-attacks; but after two days' heavy fighting the division withdrew to new positions, to which they clung alongside the *Nederland* Brigade and remnants of two Luftwaffe divisions. On 25 January Soviet attacks almost destroyed I Bataillon of the *Danmark* Regiment; the division continued a fighting retreat westwards, reaching the River Luga. On the evening of 30 January, under continuing pressure, all German troops were pulled back and the bridges were blown; however, the Red Army had already crossed further south. After two days of heavy combat *Nordland* was forced to abandon its positions along the Luga and retreat to the Narva line.

Narva, Kurland & Pomerania, 1944–45

Between February and August 1944 the units of III (germ.) SS-Pz Korps managed to hold the area around Narva despite repeated attempts to dislodge them. When the first assaults failed the Soviets unleashed a massed bombardment over several days before once again attempting to storm the German positions, the main weight now falling on the *Nederland* Brigade. After several days the Dutch were forced to withdraw from the foremost positions, but were then reinforced by elements of *Nordland*. Once again the line was held, and by now the enemy offensive

The divisional commander of *Nordland* between May 1943 and his death in action at Narva on 28 July 1944 was SS-Brigadeführer Fritz von Scholz, photographed here as an SS-Oberführer. Of particular interest is the Iron Cross 2nd Class which he wears at his throat as a substitute for the real Knight's Cross. Note also that he wears an Army officer's M1938 field cap, modified by the addition of a metal SS death's-head, and on the left side a cloth SS cap eagle on triangular black backing, from a pre-war SS-VT field cap.

had begun to lose momentum. During a period of static warfare the hardest-hit units of *Nordland* – I Btl of both the *Norge* and *Danmark* Regiments – returned to Germany for rebuilding.

On 22 June 1944 the Red Army launched its massive offensive against the German Army Group Centre – Operation 'Bagration' – which ripped a gap in the Eastern Front almost 250 miles wide, through which huge Soviet formations poured westwards. The Baltic front to the north was now in danger of being completely cut off, and in late July all German forces were withdrawn from the Narva bridgehead to the 'Tannenberg' defence line. There too heavy assaults were repulsed, but at huge cost, including the *Nordland* Division's commander, SS-Brigaf von Scholz, killed during a bombardment.

Danish volunteers wearing the rare Danish flag collar patch (the *Dannebrog*), worn only for a very short period and only by members of the Ersatzkompanie (replacement company) of the *Freikorps Danmark*. Although many veterans transferred to *Nordland* when the Freikorps was disbanded, it is unlikely that any would still be wearing this patch by that time. (H.Nielsen)

In mid-September the German forces in Estonia were ordered to withdraw into Latvia in the face of yet another offensive; and by 23 September, *Nordland* had taken up positions south-east of Riga. For the next two weeks the division took part in defensive fighting against overwhelming odds. On 6 October Army Group North, including *Nordland*, were withdrawn into Kurland (Kurzeme), Latvia's westernmost region; on the 12th, the division took up new positions in the south of the 'pocket'; and on the 13th the last bridges over the River Daugaua were blown and Riga was abandoned to the Soviets. Throughout October determined attacks on the pocket were held off, at heavy cost, but the last two months of 1944 passed relatively quietly.

On 20 January 1945 the Red Army attacked once more, and *Danmark* was all but annihilated. It was decided to evacuate the greatly weakened division by sea for refitting in Germany. Embarking at Libau, *Nordland* sailed on 28 January; arriving in Pomerania, it was allocated to the new 11. Panzer Armee in Army Group Steiner. In mid-February III (germ.) SS-Pz Korps attempted an offensive to the north-west against the flank of Zhukov's 1st White Russian Front near Arnswalde. Conceived by GFM Guderian, this Operation *'Sonnenwende'* was originally planned on a much larger front, but was scaled down on Hitler's orders into little more than a localized counter-attack. *Nordland*'s attack was a complete success, driving the enemy back as far as Lake Ihna, relieving the garrison of Arnswalde and allowing the evacuation of civilians. Inevitably, however, after the initial shock Soviet resistance stiffened; SS-Ogruf Felix Steiner eventually ordered a withdrawal, and by 28 February *Nordland* had fallen back to the area around Stargard and Stettin on the River Oder. (By this time the I Btl of both *Norge* and *Danmark* regiments had left the division, serving thereafter with the 5. SS-Pz Div *Wiking*.)

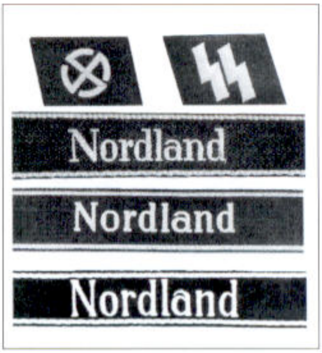
Berlin, April 1945

On 1 March 1945 the Red Army launched the greatest artillery bombardment yet seen. The German defenders could do little more than attempt to slow the flood of enemy tanks that followed, and within a week *Nordland* had been pushed back to Altdamm, the last German bridgehead on the east bank of the Oder; on 14 March the remnants were pulled

back across the river and into the town itself. Over the next few days they fought on in the rubble, but on 19 March *Nordland* was pulled out of the line and sent west for a few days' rest and refitting in the Schwedt-Angermünde area, about 40 miles north-east of Berlin. The last drafts of replacements included former Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine personnel.

The final Russian offensive opened on 16 April. *Nordland* was holding an area east of Berlin as part of LVI Panzer Korps; by the 18th, it had been pushed back into the suburbs and was declared part of the garrison. Small, fragmented battlegroups fell back through Mahlsdorf, Biesdorf and Neukölln to Tempelhof airfield; even in these last desperate days the *Hermann von Salza* battalion launched a counter-attack which held up the Soviets in the Treptow area. However, when the division was ordered to attack on 25 April the commander, SS-Brigaf Ziegler, refused to sacrifice any more of his men in futile actions. He was removed from command and replaced by SS-Brigaf Dr Gustav Krukenberg – who brought with him some 300 Frenchmen of the so-called 33. W Gren Div der SS *Charlemagne*. By 1 May a few score survivors were clinging to the rubble around the Reichs Chancellery. Krukenberg authorized them to attempt to break out, but only a handful succeeded, most being killed or captured in the final days of resistance.

Twenty-seven soldiers of the *Nordland* Division were decorated with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.



Insignia of the *Nordland* Division. Both the runic and 'sun wheel' patches were worn within the division. The divisional cuffbands are (top to bottom) in flat wire-woven, BeVo machine-woven and machine-embroidered formats.

Special insignia

Collar patches

Although the standard SS-runes were extensively used within the division, a special divisional collar patch showed a *Sonnenrad* or 'sun wheel' circular swastika.

Cuffbands

Legion:

The volunteer legions which contributed to this division were authorized cuffbands bearing the titles *'Frw. Legion Norwegen'* and *'Freikorps Danmark'*, manufactured in machine-embroidered and flat-wire woven formats. The *'Freikorps Danmark'* band was later worn by some veterans as a commemorative piece; wartime photos even show it being worn by members of the *Danmark* Regiment together with the regimental cufftitle, 'stacked' on the left forearm.

Divisional:

Troops who were not entitled to a unit cuffband were authorized to wear a band with the title *'Nordland'* in Latin script; this was manufactured in machine-embroidered, flat-wire woven and BeVo machine-woven formats.

Regimental & battalion:

'Norge' This was worn by SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 23; it was made only in a machine-woven form often described as 'BeVo-like'.

'Danmark' This was worn by SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 24; it was produced both in machine-embroidered form and in the 'BeVo-like' machine-woven style.

'Hermann von Salza' This cuffband for the divisional armoured battalion, confirmed in a document of February 1944, was manufactured only in BeVo machine-woven format.[1]

Unit cuffbands worn within the division: BeVo-woven 'Hermann von Salza' of SS-Pz Abt 11; machine-woven 'Norge' of SS-PzGren Regt 23; 'BeVo-like' machine-woven, and machine-embroidered 'Danmark' of SS-PzGren Regt 24.

1 Hermann von Salza (c.1170–1239) was Grand Master of the Order of Teutonic Knights during crusades against the pagan Prussians, and was instrumental in reconciling German and Danish rulers.

Photographed as an SS-Obersturmbannführer, Kurt 'Panzer-' Meyer, who took command of the *Hitlerjugend* Division in Normandy after the death of Fritz Witt on 16 June. His military career came to an end in September 1944, when he was captured by the Belgian Resistance.

British Free Corps

Perhaps 20 members of this tiny propaganda unit are believed to have been attached briefly to the division's reconnaissance battalion – SS-Pz Aufk Abt 11 – in March 1945 while it was out of the line in the Angermünde area south of Stettin. A cuffband with the legend *'British Free Corps'* (English spelling) in machine-embroidered Gothic script was photographed being worn.

Arm shields

This division probably saw the greatest variety of national arm shields worn by troops under its command during its two-year life. These included those of Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Holland, and presumably Great Britain (see page 45). These insignia, in the form of a shield bearing the national colours, were generally worn on the lower left sleeve; some of the earlier Army (as opposed to Waffen-SS) style shields were also worn, on the upper right sleeve.

12. SS-PANZER DIVISION *HITLERJUGEND*

Designations

February 1943	SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Hitlerjugend*
October 1943	12. SS-Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend*

Commanders

June 1943–June 1944 SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Witt; *June–Sept 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer; *Sept–Oct 1944* SS-Obersturmbannführer Hubert Meyer; *Oct–Nov 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Kramer; *Nov 1944–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Hugo Kraas

Principal elements

SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 25; SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 26; SS-Panzer Regiment 12; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 12; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 12; SS-Flak Abteilung 12; SS-Werfer Abteilung 12; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 12; SS-Panzer Pionier Abteilung 12

Campaigns

Individual voluntary enlistment by members of the Hitler Youth organization had been encouraged by the Waffen-SS, but in early 1943 the HJ's National Leader, Artur Axmann, suggested to Himmler that a complete division be formed from HJ boys born in 1926. Hitler approved the plan, and recruiting chief SS-Gruf Berger even proposed himself as the commander. Himmler sensibly preferred a combat veteran with close links to the HJ, SS-Staf Fritz Witt, a 35-year-old regimental commander in the *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* and holder of the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves; Witt became Germany's second youngest general (after the 31-year-old Luftwaffe GenMaj Adolf Galland) when promoted SS-Brigadeführer on 1 July 1943.

In May 1943 the first 8,000 17-year-olds reported for two months' preparatory instruction; and by 1 September, 16,000 youths were forming the units of the *Hitlerjugend* Division at Belgian training areas. The cadre of battle-proven officers and NCOs came mainly from the

Leibstandarte, but a number of Army officers were also posted in. Initially a Panzergrenadier division, the formation was numbered '12th' and up-rated to a Panzer division in October, with a complete regiment of 218 PzKw IV and PzKw V tanks. Even when the cadre were included the average age was only 18 years; and it is interesting to note that rations of sweets – candy – were allocated instead of cigarettes.

Once declared ready for active service (Frontfähig), the division moved in April 1944 to northern France, under I SS-Panzer Korps.

When Allied troops landed in Normandy on 6 June 1944, *Hitlerjugend* was ordered forward, and after a night march it was the first SS formation into action on 7 June. A battlegroup under the CO of SS-PzGren Regt 25, SS-Staf Kurt Meyer, and including a battalion of PzKw IV tanks, drove back the Canadian 27th Armd Bde on Caen-Carpiquet airfield, and in their first action the young soldiers claimed 28 Allied tanks destroyed for the loss of only six men. The pattern was repeated for the next month; the teenage soldiers followed their seasoned officers in a series of highly effective attacks on British and Canadian forces around Caen. One result of their inexperience and fanaticism was high losses: the *Hitlerjugend* took more than 60 per cent casualties in four weeks. Another was violations of the Geneva Convention: some 64 Canadian and British prisoners had been murdered by 16 June (atrocities for which Kurt Meyer later served nine years of a life sentence). Fritz Witt was killed by naval gunfire on 16 June, and command passed to the 33-year-old 'Panzermeyer', who led the division in almost continual fighting against great odds until the survivors were withdrawn to the Potigny area on 11 July.

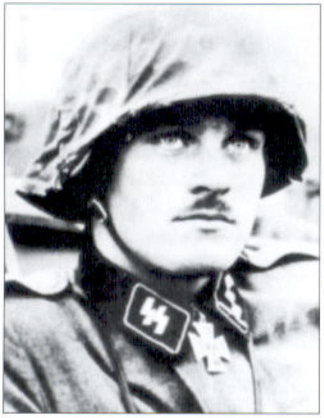
A youthful SS-Sturmmann from the Sturmgeschütz battalion of the *Hitlerjugend* Division (see Plate B2). He wears the machine-woven divisional cuffband; interestingly, this was so highly regarded that it was presented, complete with an award certificate, only to those who had proven themselves in combat. It is believed that the first issues were made after the Normandy battles and before the Ardennes offensive.

A week later they were back in the line, facing the British Operation 'Goodwood'. Early August found I SS-Pz Korps divided, with the *Leibstandarte* sent west to Avranches, while the *Hitlerjugend* held the northern edge of the 'Falaise Pocket' in which the Allies sought to trap some 90,000 Germans. Fiercely resisting the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Armd Divs, Meyer fought with great determination although facing overwhelming artillery and under skies ruled by Allied aircraft. The *Hitlerjugend* avoided encirclement, but of the troops in the pocket only some 30,000 escaped; Meyer was wounded while holding Hill 159 against 3rd Canadian Inf Div with some 500 Panzergrenadiers. About 3,500 survivors fell back to the Belgian border; by early September, when it reached the River Meuse, Meyer had been captured and the 12. SS-Pz Div numbered only some 600 fit men and no tanks.

The Ardennes and after, 1944–45

Rebuilt and refitted, in December 1944 the division took part in the Ardennes offensive under 6. SS-Pz Armee. Divided into four Kampfgruppen for attacks along the Elsenborn Ridge, the division made little progress and was redeployed; by 1 January 1945 it formed part of the ring around besieged Bastogne, but by the 18th all the forces committed had been obliged to withdraw.

After the abandonment of the 'Battle of the Bulge', *Hitlerjugend* was sent with *Leibstandarte* to Hungary to take part in Operation *'Frühlingserwachsen'*, the offensive around Lake Balaton. In early



SS-Obersturmbannführer Gerd Bremer, shown here as an SS-Obersturmführer, at one time led the Panzeraufklärungs Abteilung of the *Hitlerjugend* Division, winning the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross in this command on 26 November 1944. Bremer survived the war, dying in 1989.

The collar and cuff insignia worn by 12. SS-Pz Div *Hitlerjugend*. In addition to the authorized machine-woven cuffband, a Sütterlin script version (below) is known from photographic evidence to have been worn by some men within the division.

February the division fought in the successful preliminary destruction of a Russian bridgehead on the River Gran; and on 6 March the main offensive opened. As recounted in MAA 401 in the chapter devoted to the *Leibstandarte*, a combination of atrocious terrain and stubborn resistance brought this to a premature halt. The I SS-Panzer Korps was forced into a fighting retreat to the north-west, and by 13 April had been driven out of Vienna; on that date the total strength of the *Hitlerjugend* – including men in hospital or detached – was just over 7,730, but its fighting strength was far fewer. The priority was now to move westwards towards the advancing US Army so as to avoid capture by the Soviets; and on 8 May 1945 some hundreds of survivors of the 12. SS-Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend* (and one remaining tank) surrendered to the US 65th Infantry Division near Enns in Austria.

Fifteen men of the *Hitlerjugend* Division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Cuffband

The only special insignia authorized was a cuffband bearing the divisional title in Latin script; this was manufactured only in the machine-woven so-called 'BeVo-like' format.

A cuffband also exists in machine-embroidered form with the inscription in Sütterlin script. This was not a Waffen-SS cuffband but was intended for members of the leadership corps of the Hitler Youth; however, there is photographic evidence of its wear by members of the division.

13. WAFFEN GEBIRGS DIVISION DER SS *HANDSCHAR* (kroatische Nr.1)

Designations

March 1943	Muselmannisches *or* Kroatisches Division
July 1943	13. Kroatische SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgs Division
October 1943	13. SS-Freiwilligen bosn.herzogow. Gebirgs Division (Kroatien)
May 1944	13. Waffen Gebirgs Division der SS *Handschar* (kroatische Nr.1)[2]

Commanders

March–Aug 1943 SS-Standartenführer Herbert von Obwurzer; *Aug 1943–Aug 1944* SS-Oberführer Karl-Gustav Sauberzweig; *Aug 1944–May 1945* SS-Oberführer Desiderius Hampel

Principal elements (May 1944)

SS-Waffen Gebirgsjäger Regiment 27 (kroatisches Nr.1); SS-Waffen Gebirgsjäger Regiment 28 (kroat. Nr.2); SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 13; SS-Waffen Artillerie Regiment 13; SS-Freiwillige Flak Abteilung 13; SS-Aufklärungs Abteilung 13; SS-Gebirgs Pionier Abteilung 13

2 This indecision over the title reflects both the racial neuroses of the SS and the chaos of ethnic communities in semi-occupied Yugoslavia. Croatia, part of the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was now officially recognized as a separate nation and Axis partner; Bosnia-Hercegovina was the old Austro-Hungarian imperial province from which these Muslim troops were enlisted. The title 'Handschar' adopted that May was a term used by Germans for a curve-bladed Muslim edged weapon, as selected for the division's collar patch emblem.

Campaigns

The idea of creating a volunteer division of Muslims from Croatian possessions in the now fragmented Yugoslavia was first raised by Himmler in late 1942; Hitler favoured the idea, but authorization for its raising was not given until February 1943. The intention was to harness the historical enmities between different communities to serve German ends. The Communist partisans under Tito, who were proving so troublesome to the Italian and German occupiers, were predominantly from the traditionally Orthodox Christian population of Serbia. There was a historical hostility between the Serbs and the roughly 40 per cent Muslim population of the often-disputed province of Bosnia-Hercegovina.

An SS-Unterscharführer from the German cadre of the *Handschar* Division. This view shows the fez and its regulation machine-woven insignia to good advantage. The ribbons of the Iron Cross 2nd Class and Eastern Front Winter 1941/42 medal identify a combat veteran. (Gary Wood)

Despite obstruction by Ante Pavelic's Croatian regime, recruitment began in March 1943. The SS made use of the pro-Nazi Muslim religious leader, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, to encourage the cause of fighting the 'Jewish-Bolshevik menace'. Initial efforts brought in almost 8,000 volunteers, but this flow soon slackened. Stern measures were taken against Croatian obstruction; the numbers were bulked out by transfers of Muslims from the ranks of the Croatian forces, and the Germans soon resorted to blatant conscription. Leadership was provided by (predominantly) Volksdeutsche and some Muslim officers of the Croatian Army, and by a Reichsdeutsche and Volksdeutsche cadre transferred from the 7. SS Frw Geb Div *Prinz Eugen* (see MAA 404).

The Muslim troops were unique within the SS in being permitted to have their own religious teachers (imams) serving with them. Chaplains served in the German Army and Navy (but not in the Luftwaffe); Waffen-SS troops were not formally forbidden to hold religious beliefs, but the officially approved status was *'Gottglaubige'* or 'believer in God', as opposed to declared membership of a specific faith.

In July 1943 it was decided that the division should be formed at a safe distance from local distractions, around Le Puy in central France. This move was unpopular, and not only with the openly resentful conscripts; many of the volunteers had reportedly been tricked into enlisting and had no wish to become part of the Waffen-SS. Morale was further damaged by the contemptuous attitude shown towards these 'Mujos' by German and Volksdeutsche cadres. This culminated on 16 September 1944 in a mutiny at Villefranche-sur-Rouergue by about 1,000 men, who killed a number of officers and NCOs before being disarmed by better-disciplined units. Ringleaders were executed, some 250 were sent to concentration camps, and more than 500 others into forced labour with the Todt Organization.

The elements of the division were moved progressively to training areas in Silesia, and in January 1944 its strength was listed as 21,065 all ranks. By mid-February it had returned to northern Bosnia, based around

A company of *Handschar* mountain riflemen formed up for review. Note that the Edelweiss right sleeve patch of SS mountain troops is not yet worn. Although all the fezzes issued were of simple construction – made from compressed felt, unlined, with a simple sweatband and a black central tassel – the exact sizes and degree of stiffness varied. Some were significantly taller than others; the tassel came in various lengths, and was sometimes removed in the field. (Josef Charita)

Brcko on the River Sava; and in March it was serving against Tito's partisans as part of V SS Mountain Corps alongside the *Prinz Eugen* Division. Not long after its arrival *Handschar* lost one of its battalions, transferred to provide a cadre for the Albanian 21. Division *Skanderbeg* (see below). Manpower was swiftly made up by local recruitment; but only a month later the division had to provide yet another large cadre for 23. Division *Kama* (see below), and in June over 1,300 men were transferred.

From March to September 1944 *Handschar* continued anti-partisan operations, committing many atrocities. By the latter month the general withdrawal of German forces from the Aegean and Balkans had begun, as a consequence of the defection of Bulgaria and Romania from the Axis; and *Handschar* suffered 2,000-plus desertions in September alone. (Returns for 20 September still give a paper strength of 18,520, of whom 6,015 were German.) Things came to a head in October when a large part of the division's supposedly elite Begleitkompanie ('escort company') deserted. The furious Himmler ordered all Bosnians whose loyalty was suspect to be disarmed and assigned to labour duties.

In mid-October *Handschar* became a regimental battlegroup; some sources state that it had roughly equal numbers of Germans/Volksdeutsche and loyal Muslim volunteers, others that there were few if any Bosnians remaining. The unit was led by SS-Stubaf Hans Hanke of Regt 28; in November–December by SS-Staf Helmuth Raithel; and again by SS-Ostubaf Hanke from January 1945. By November the unit was in action against Red Army advances in southern Hungary and in the Danube bridgeheads in northern Yugoslavia, retreating into the so-called 'Margaret Redoubt' between the River Drava and Lake Balaton. In December the *Handschar* battlegroup was near Barcs on the Drava, under LXVIII Korps of 2. Panzer-Armee.

This sector was relatively static until late March 1945, when a renewed Soviet offensive pushed the Germans out of the Margarethe-Stellung. The battlegroup retreated westwards into the Austrian mountains, moving north past Klagenfurt; and in early May the survivors surrendered to British troops south of St Veit. Given *Handschar*'s reputation, they were lucky to fall into British rather than Soviet or Yugoslav hands (although there is an unconfirmed report that some were handed over to Tito's forces and subsequently executed).

Five members of the *Handschar* Division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Handschar troops relax at mealtime outside their tent, made by buttoning together a number of SS camouflaged shelter-quarters. (Josef Charita)

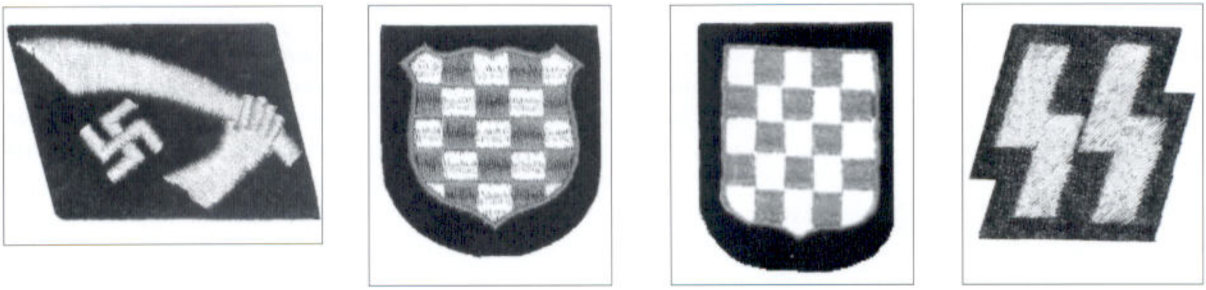
Special insignia

Collar patches

A special collar patch was introduced for this division showing a hand holding a scimitar ('Handschar') and a small swastika. German cadre staff were entitled to display their full SS status by an SS-runes emblem on the left breast.

Arm shields

The majority of personnel wore a sleeve shield showing a red/white chequered field, the colours of Croatia; but photographs also show the use of the Albanian shield within the division.



Insignia of the *Handschar* Division. Two styles of Croatian national arm shield are illustrated, as well as the embroidered runic patch worn on the left breast pocket by members of the German cadre.

Special headgear

Special dispensation was given for the wearing of the traditional Muslim *fez* in place of the field cap. This was produced in field-grey for field wear and in dark red for dress wear; in both cases, standard machine-woven SS eagle and death's-head insignia were applied. A few photographs also show a third, conical type in field-grey (see page 46).

14. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (ukrainische Nr.1)

Designations

April 1943	SS-Freiwilligen Division *Galizien*
October 1943	14. Galizische SS-Freiwilligen Division
July 1944	14. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (galizische Nr.1)
November 1944	14. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (ukrainische Nr.1)
April 1945	1. Division der ukrainischen National Armee

Commanders

June–Nov 1943 SS-Gruppenführer Walther Schimana; *Nov 1943–Apr 1944 & Sept 1944–Apr 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Freitag; *Apr–July 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Sylvester Stadler; *July–Sept 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Nikolaus Heilmann; *Apr–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Pavlo Shandruk

SS-Standartenführer Rudolf Pannier (shown here as an SS-Obersturmbannführer) was a former career Police officer who won the Knight's Cross with the 4. *SS-Polizei* Division, and subsequently served with the 14. Waffen Grenadier Division.

Principal elements (late 1944)[3]

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 29 (galizisches Nr.1); Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 30 (gal. Nr.2); Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 31 (gal. Nr.3); SS-Fusilier Bataillon 14; SS-Waffen Panzerjäger Kompanie 14; Waffen Artillerie Regiment der SS 14; Waffen Pionier Bataillon der SS 14

Campaigns

Galicia was the administrative title for an area extending from south-east Poland eastwards into the Ukraine, which formed the largest province of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. The northern part was seized by Poland in 1921, the remainder being taken by the Soviet Union. On the defeat of Poland in 1939, the Germans ceded the northern part to the Soviets. When the Germans smashed their way into this region in summer 1941 the majority of the population – initially at least –

3 SS-Frw Flak Abt 14 was not reformed after annihilation at Brody in July 1944. SS-Fus Btl 14, formed in Jan 1944 from III/SS Frw Gren Regt 29, became Fus Btl/14. W Gren Div der SS in Sept 44, indicating a change from German to foreign personnel. Army and W-SS 'Fusilier' battalions were generally created as light infantry units from former reconnaissance battalions.

welcomed them as liberators; the Ukrainians were fiercely nationalistic and no lovers of the Russian Communist regime.

The former Galicia was absorbed into the so-called Generalgouvernement, i.e. occupied Poland; but some Germans argued for harnessing Ukrainian hostility against the Soviets. Many anti-Communist security units were raised; and by late 1942 military reverses prompted consideration of more ambitious plans. Sensing another opportunity to expand his SS empire, Himmler began to extol the 'Germanic' virtues of the Galicians, who had been influenced by direct Austrian crown rule since 1772; and in March 1943 he authorized the raising of a volunteer division. This was to be titled and badged strictly as 'Galician' rather than Ukrainian – a fiction which deceived nobody but Hitler. The officers were to be sought among Ukrainian former officers of the Austro-Hungarian and Polish armies, and the NCOs among ex-soldiers of both, with preference for the former.

A Waffen-Unterscharführer from the 14. Waffen Grenadier Division. This excellent portrait shot clearly shows the rampant lion collar patch. The ribbon over the soldier's breast pocket is that for the War Merit Cross 2nd Class. (Otto Spronk)

Fired by the hope that this was a step towards German support for Ukrainian independence, as many as 80,000 volunteers came forward in a matter of weeks; by July a selected 13,000 had been accepted for the new SS division. (The excess were formed into Ordnungspolizei regiments, later used as a pool of replacements for the division.) Drafts of officers and NCOs were despatched to Germany for training, and the division was even authorized a number of priests (of the local Eastern Catholic faith) – something unheard of in German SS units. As the division was formed during summer and autumn 1943 at the Heidelager training area east of Debica in Poland, it seems that the Ukrainian nationalist underground (the UPA), recognizing the growing danger of the Ukraine being retaken by the Soviets, tacitly agreed not to interfere with recruitment, and that a number of them actually joined up.

As with other foreign volunteer formations, however, the nationalistic flavour of the recruiting propaganda was quickly forgotten once the enlistees had joined their units and came under the firm discipline of German officers, and the unpopular SS-Brigaf Fritz Freitag discriminated against the officers of Ukrainian origin at every level. Himmler's refusal to allow the word 'Ukrainian' to be even mentioned contributed towards low morale.

In February–March 1944 a battlegroup took part in anti-partisan operations behind the central sector of the Eastern Front. The division moved to the Neuhammer training area in Silesia in April; and in June, although unready, it was sent to the front under 1. Panzer-Armee of Army Group North Ukraine. In July the 14. Division found itself around Brody north-east of Lvov, in the path of the great Soviet summer offensive, Operation 'Bagration'. The division was forced back almost immediately, and encircled with a number of others in the so-called 'Brody Pocket'. During a break-out attempt on 21/22 July about one man in five managed to escape.

The 14. Division survivors were fragmented, some of them later returning via Hungarian territory; others headed for the Carpathian Mountains, and fought on alone behind Soviet lines.[4] Only some 3,000 men returned to Neuhammer as the nucleus for a rebuilt division; but by then 8,000 other Ukrainians were available to join them.

Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler inspects men of the 14. Division; this photograph has been variously dated to May 1943 and June 1944, but the earlier date is the more likely. The portly officer in the paler coat left of Himmler may be SS-Brigadeführer Dr Wachter, the Nazi governor of Galicia who argued for recognition of the division's Ukrainian identity, but in vain: to Himmler 'Galicians' were 'Germanic', but Ukrainians were Slavic 'sub-humans'. Another photo from the same sequence shows the lion-and-crowns armshield worn by an officer, though not yet by the rank and file. Under magnification the officer cut by the left hand edge of this photo can be seen to wear it below his sleeve eagle. (Private collection)

In August 1944, shortly after the rebuilding of the division had commenced at Neuhammer, a Soviet-backed rising in Slovakia threatened the route of withdrawal of 8. Armee from Galicia. A regiment-sized Kampfgruppe was formed from personnel of Waffen-SS training schools and replacement battalions. This force, entitled SS-PzGren Regt Schill, moved on the centre of the revolt at Neusohl; it was reinforced with a battlegroup formed around III Btl/Regt 29 from the 14. Division. This Kampfgruppe Beyersdorff was only in Slovakia briefly before rejoining the division, which had now transferred to Zilina in Slovakia to continue formation and training. In November 1944 its Ukrainian identity was finally recognized by a change of national suffix in the title.

In late January 1945 the division – 14,000 strong – was ordered to the borders of southern Austria and Slovenia to face Tito's partisans. It almost ceased to exist in late March when Hitler eventually discovered its existence, but he was persuaded to relent. In late April, Himmler agreed to transfer the division to the so-called Ukrainian National Army under Gen Pavlo Shandruk, but given the chaotic situation in the last two weeks of the war this was little more than a paper exercise. After brief action against Soviet forces, the survivors of the division were more fortunate than many of their fellow eastern European volunteers. Surrendering to the British near Radstadt on 8 May, Shandruk's troops successfully claimed to be anti-Communist Polish 'Galicians' rather than Soviet citizens, and thus escaped being handed over to the Russians.

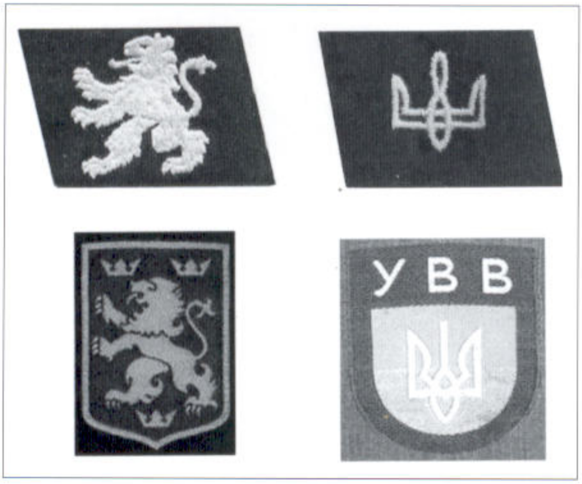
One soldier from the 14. Division was decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Collar patches

A collar patch worn within this division showed a rampant lion, facing left. A second design showing a stylized Ukrainian trident emblem (the 'Trident of Vladimir') was also produced but is often said never to have been issued; there is, however, evidence for its display by at least some members of the division.

4 Astonishingly, some of this element survived under arms until late 1946, eventually escaping into the US zone of Germany via Czechoslovakian territory.



Insignia of the 14. Waffen Grenadier Division. (Top left) the machine-embroidered rampant lion collar patch authorized for and widely worn by this division. (Top right) the alternative Ukrainian 'Trident of Vladimir' emblem, now known to have been worn by at least some individuals. (Bottom left) the Galician arm shield, with golden-yellow rampant lion, crowns and border on a blue field. (Bottom right) the Cyrillic 'UVV' yellow and light blue shield on a green ground, designed for the Ukrainian National Army into which the division was absorbed in the closing days of the war.

Arm shields

A Galician sleeve shield was manufactured for this division, showing a golden-yellow rampant lion between three yellow crowns on a blue field; this was manufactured in both machine-woven and machine-embroidered forms. From April 1945, when the remnants of the division were transferred to the Ukrainian National Army, a new shield was ordered to be worn; made in both machine-woven and printed forms, this had a halved field of yellow above light blue, with a central white trident motif, all set below the white Cyrillic letters YBB ('UVV' in Latin script), on a larger green shield. It seems highly unlikely that this badge ever reached the units.

15. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (lettische Nr.1)

Designations

February 1943	Lettische SS-Freiwilligen Division
October 1943	15. Lettische SS-Freiwilligen Division
June 1944	15. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (lettische Nr.1)

Commanders

Feb–May 1943 SS-Brigadeführer Peter Hansen; *May 1943–Feb 1944* SS-Gruppenführer Carl Graf von Pückler-Burghaus; *Feb–July 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Nikolaus Heilmann; *July 1944–Jan 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Herbert von Obwurzer; *Jan 1945* SS-Oberführer Dr Eduard Deisenhofer; *Jan–Feb 1945* SS-Oberführer Adolf Ax; *Feb–May 1945* SS-Oberführer Karl Burk

Principal elements (summer 1944)[5]

Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 32 (lettisches Nr.3); Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 33 (lett. Nr.4); Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 34 (lett. Nr.5); Lett. SS-Fusilier Bataillon 15; Lett. SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 15 (incl. Jagdpanzer & Flak companies numbered 15); Waffen Artillerie Regiment der SS 15; SS-Waffen Pionier Bataillon 15

Campaigns

Latvia was one of the three Baltic states forcibly annexed to the USSR in June 1940, having enjoyed only 20 years of independence after a long history of German and Russian domination. Soviet repression was so harsh that the German invasion of summer 1941 was seen as liberation. The Germans raised a number of Schutzmannschaften ('Schuma') units of para-military police in Latvia, as in the other occupied Eastern territories, and a number of Latvian volunteers were also accepted into the Wehrmacht. Schuma battalions were sent into the line on the

5 Title changes were highly complex; see Bender & Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization & History of the Waffen-SS*, Vol.4, pp.89–93.

Leningrad front from October 1941, later attached to the 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) of the Kommandostab RF-SS.

The record is confused by Himmler's decision in February 1943 that in Latvia's case the term 'SS Volunteer Legion' would apply not to a single tactical unit, but should embrace all Latvians in German service. It was within this umbrella designation that a 'Latvian SS Volunteer Division' was authorized in February, drawing upon fresh recruits, Latvians serving with the Wehrmacht, and drafts from other SS-controlled units. These did not include the original Schuma battalions already at the front, who formed a separate brigade (see 19. Division, below).

The flow of volunteers was limited by muddled efforts and mutual suspicion between German and Latvian authorities; as usual, contradictory promises were made over the degree of national independence the force was to be given. Conscription was adopted as early as March 1943; in May, the Latvian Gen Rudolf Bangerskis was appointed to the rank of SS-Gruppenführer and made Inspector General of the Latvian SS Legion; and late in the year increased Latvian control over recruitment led to improved results. Forming up and training continued during March–November 1943, and by the end of the year the division had attained a strength of some 20,000 men.

In November 1943 the division was in reserve on the northern Russian Front under 16. Armee. In January 1944, Regt 34 and part of Regt 33 were attached to Wehrmacht units, taking heavy casualties around Novosokolniki during the Soviet offensive which broke the German encirclement of Leningrad. By mid-February the rest of the division were around Belebelka on the west bank of the River Radja; they fought rearguard actions during withdrawal to the 'Panther Redoubt' on the River Velikaya, where the division was reunited.

By mid-March the 15. and 19. Divisions together formed VI SS-Freiwilligen Korps under 18. Armee, holding a front of nearly 20 miles along the Velikaya, only 20 to 40 miles east of the Latvian border. A number of Russian assaults were held off at heavy cost; a Soviet bridgehead in the 15. Division's sector of the west bank was at first contained. Costly fighting continued until mid-April, when both Latvian divisions were transferred to 16. Armee in the Bardovo/Kudever area about 20 miles east of Opochka.

Defensive fighting continued throughout May, the Latvians being inspired by the fear that their homeland would once again be occupied by the Soviets. In concert with Operation 'Bagration' against Army Group Centre, on 10 July a massive attack pushed the whole of Army Group North westwards, and the survivors of the 15. Division fell back into Latvia nine days later fragmented into various battlegroups, some of which suffered over 96 per cent casualties – Regt 32 was almost completely annihilated. In July some survivors were transferred into the 19. Division, and the others were withdrawn to the Sophienwalde/Konitz area of Prussia as cadres for rebuilding the 15. Division.

By the end of September 1944 the division had been restored to just under 17,000 men. Morale suffered badly when, on 13 October, the Latvian capital Riga fell; from now on the hope of saving their homeland faded, but the Latvians were still willing to fight. In December 1944 the division received personnel from a number of disbanded Latvian police battalions.

SS-Standartenführer Nikolaus Heilmann was a career Police officer who rose to the rank of SS-Brigadeführer, and commanded 15. Waffen Grenadier Division from February to July 1944. This former chief of staff of VI SS-Freiwilligen Korps took over after (according to one source) his predecessor SS-Gruf Count von Pückler-Burghaus was killed in action. Heilmann was decorated with the Knight's Cross for his command of the Latvian division during this period when – already battered in the first stages of the Soviet offensive which relieved Leningrad – it took further heavy casualties while holding the 'Panther-Stellung' on the Velikaya river line south of Ostrov.

The Soviet advance into East Prussia in January 1945 sent the re-formed division back into the front line near Nakel under 3. Panzer Armee. Driven back, some troops shipped out through Danzig, where others remained to be captured by the Red Army in March. During February most of the infantry made a fighting retreat, broken up into battlegroups. In late March the 8,000-odd survivors were ordered to Mecklenberg for refitting and 'fortress construction', and were unable to join their sister division in Kurland as originally intended. Most surrendered in separate groups to US and Canadian forces near Schwerin on 2–3 May. Kampfgruppe Janums skirted south through the eastern suburbs of Berlin, fighting several actions before most reached American captivity at Güterglück on 27 April; SS-Fus Btl 15 became separated and fought in Berlin until overrun on 3 May.

Three members of the division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

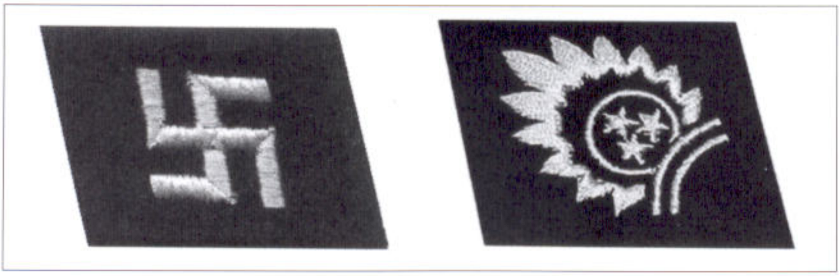
Collar patches

Two designs were introduced for this division, the first showing a large 'static' swastika (i.e. the arms parallel to all edges of the patch), known in Latvia as the 'fire cross'. This was ordered in March 1943, and until it became available blank right hand patches were supposed to be worn. The SS-runes were forbidden, but some personnel certainly wore them in the Latvian Brigade and both divisions. A second patch was authorized following the adoption of the original 'fire cross' by the new 19. Division; bearing an emblem of three small stars within a circle surmounted by an 11-point sunburst, this was still arriving for issue in January 1945, and the order of September 1944 permitted the old type to continue in use until it was available.

Arm shields

The display of national colours was important for Latvian morale; they obtained shields from several sources, and photos show a variety of designs differing in detail. The shield was ordered worn on the upper right sleeve from July 1943, and on the left sleeve below the SS eagle from June 1944. The shield was crimson with a white diagonal stripe from top right to bottom left, and the word 'LATVIJA' either in white on

BELOW **Insignia of the 15. Waffen Grenadier Division. (Left) the machine-embroidered 'fire cross' collar patch initially worn as an alternative to the SS-runes. (Centre) the 'sun and stars' patch which officially replaced it from autumn 1944. (Below) one of the many variants of Latvian arm shield; this is the official Waffen-SS version, in a rather brighter red than Latvian-made examples. Although worn to some extent this was reportedly unpopular, and from its broad black border it was nicknamed the 'mourning shield'.**



OPPOSITE **Latvian SS volunteers wearing the SS-rune collar patch, officially forbidden; and on the upper right sleeve the form of arm shield with the 'LATVIJA' lettering on a separate top panel. (Dodkins Collection)**

the top left corner, or in yellow on a separate black upper panel. Shields of both simple and more elaborate shapes are known, in both printed and embroidered forms, with or without the lettering, and including some locally made pieces assembled from available materials. A German-made final Waffen-SS pattern with a broad black border was authorized in mid-1944.

16. SS-PANZERGRENADIER DIVISION *REICHSFÜHRER-SS*

Designations

Feb–Oct 1943	Sturmbrigade *Reichsführer-SS*
October 1943	16. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Reichsführer-SS*

Commanders

Feb–Oct 1943 SS-Obersturmbannführer Karl Gesele; *Oct 1943–Oct 1944* SS-Gruppenführer Max Simon; *Oct 1944–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Otto Baum

Principal elements (1944)

SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 35; SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 36; SS-Panzergrenadier Lehr Regiment 16; SS-Panzer Abteilung 16 (assault guns); SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 16 (strong in SP guns); SS-Artillerie Regiment 16; SS-Flak Abteilung 16; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 16; SS-Pionier Bataillon 16

Campaigns

In May 1941 troops from Himmler's Kommandostab RF-SS formed a new elite 'escort' unit, the Begleit Bataillon RF-SS. After the opening of the Russian campaign it was employed with the rest of this command on anti-partisan duty. In February 1943 it was decided to upgrade the battalion to brigade status, and at this time it was renamed as 'Assault Brigade Reichführer-SS'. Before leaving the front the unit is believed to have operated alongside troops commanded by the notorious Oskar Dirlewanger during an anti-partisan operation near Minsk, Operation *'Kottbus'*, in March 1943.

SS-Gruppenführer Max Simon, commander of the *Reichsführer-SS* Division (see Plate E3). This is from footage taken during German surrender negotiations in 1945, hence the white armband. The divisional cuffband can be clearly seen, even though Simon had left this command in October 1944.

Shortly thereafter the embryo brigade was moved to the Mediterranean island of Corsica, and during the summer Himmler took steps to enlarge it to divisional status. In September it was on stand-by for use against the Italians should they decide to resist the German occupation following the unilateral Italian armistice. On 3 October, Hitler approved the formation of the division; the Sturmbrigade provided the nucleus, with various SS training and replacement units, a draft from the 9. Division *Hohenstaufen*, and a considerable number of Hungarian Volksdeutsche. During the last quarter of 1943 and early 1944 the new 16. Division was forming up and training in Slovenia and at Baden south of Vienna, reaching a strength of just under 13,000 by the end of the year.

In late January 1944 the Anglo-US landings around Anzio and Nettuno on the west coast of Italy led to parts of both Panzergrenadier regiments and the Panzerjäger unit being rushed to this front, seeing combat under 14. Armee until 9 March. A battalion from the division

may also have been involved in anti-partisan operations on the Eastern Front in early 1944.

At the same time, much of the division was allocated to Operation *'Margarethe'*, the German plan for the occupation of Hungary, whose Axis leadership was wavering. These elements – reinforced by a newly re-formed Begleit Btl RF-SS, and an SS-PzGren Lehr Regt from the Prosetschnitz training school – left Baden in March 1944 for occupation duties around Debrecen. By April the detached units from Italy rejoined; some men were transferred to the 3. SS-Pz Div *Totenkopf*, and replaced by local recruitment. However, the 16. Division was very soon on its way back to Italy, where it was reported in May.

As a Reichsdeutsche formation at least in name, despite the many Volksdeutsche in its ranks, the 16. Division wore the regulation SS-runes on the right collar. The divisional title was worn only as a BeVo-woven cuffband, though slight variations of lettering style are known, with the *umlaut* woven with either round or square dots.

Throughout June and July 1944 the division, as part of LXXV Korps, resisted the British 8th Army's advance in Liguria, making a fighting retreat via Siena and Pisa to Carrara in August. Later operations were under XIV Panzer Korps, and I Fallschirm Korps, part of 10. Armee. By the end of 1944 some 3,000 casualties had reduced divisional strength to just below 14,000. Under attacks by Italian partisans the division also reverted to its former standards of behaviour: men from SS-Pz Aufkl Abt 16 executed 560 civilian men, women and children at Sant'Anna di Stazzema on 12 August. Later that month troops thought to be from the division killed a further 370 civilians at Bardene San Terenzo; and SS-Pz Aufkl Abt 16 killed perhaps 1,670 during 29 August–3 September and on 1 October, in villages around Marzabotto.[6]

In January 1945 the division moved from the Apennine mountains north-east to the area south of Lake Commachio; it then entrained at Ferrara (minus its anti-tank battalion) for transfer back to Hungary during February. There it came under 6. SS-Panzer Armee for Operation *'Frühlingserwachsen'*, the March offensive around Lake Balaton, where it had no more success than any of the other formations committed to this ill-planned attack (see MAA 401, under 1. SS-Pz Div *LSSAH*).

During late March and April, under XXII Gebirgs Korps of 2. Panzer Armee, the division – still about 13,000 strong on paper, but with far fewer men in the line – was pushed back steadily westwards into southern Austria. The remnants surrendered in early May to British forces west of Graz, and to US troops around Klagenfurt and Radstadt.

One soldier from this division was decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Cuffband

A divisional cuffband bearing the title *'Reichsführer-SS'* was manufactured only in BeVo machine-woven style.

6 The CO of SS-Pz Aufkl Abt 16, SS-Hstuf Walter Reder, was acquitted in 1967 by an Italian military court at Bologna of responsibility for the Sant'Anna massacre, but sentenced to life imprisonment for those around Marzabotto. Early in 2004 a court at La Spezia finally indicted three other former officers in their 80s – Gerhard Sommer, Alfred Schonenberg & Ludwig Sonntag – for the Sant'Anna massacre, but due to extradition problems it is unclear at the time of writing if they will ever stand trial.

17. SS-PANZERGRENADIER DIVISION *GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN*

Designation

October 1943–May 1945 17. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Götz von Berlichingen*[7]

Commanders

Oct 1943–Jan 1944, June & Aug 1944 SS-Standartenführer Otto Binge; *Jan–June, & Oct–Nov 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Werner Ostendorff; *June–July 1944* SS-Standartenführer Otto Baum; *Sept 1944* SS-Oberführer Dr Eduard Diesenhofer, SS-Oberführer Thomas Muller, SS-Standartenführer Gustav Mertsch; *Nov 1944–Jan 1945* SS-Standartenführer Hans Linger; *Jan 1945* Oberst Gerhard Lindner (Army); *Jan–Mar 1945* SS-Oberführer Fritz Klingenberg; *Mar 1945* SS-Standartenführer Jakob Fick, SS-Obersturmbannführer Vinzenz Kaiser; *Mar–May 1945* SS-Oberführer Georg Bochmann

Principal elements (June 1944)

SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 37; SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 38; SS-Panzer Abteilung 17 (assault guns); SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 17; SS-Artillerie Regiment 17; SS-Flak Abteilung 17; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 17; SS-Pionier Bataillon 17

Campaigns

This division, like the 16th, was ordered into being by Hitler on 3 October 1943. Over the next eight months the manpower and equipment were brought together at various bases in western France, the HQ being at Thouars south of Le Mans. Personnel included transfers from the 10. and 16. Divisions, training and replacement units, and Volksdeutsche from the Balkans and Italy.

Committed as part of LXXXIV Korps, 7. Armee, following the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944, the division faced the same problems as many others as it struggled to reach the front, hampered by enemy aircraft and by shortages of transport and fuel. The first unit to see action was the armoured reconnaissance battalion, which engaged troops of the British 7th Armd Div near Trévières on 10 June, while the bulk of the division was stranded around Vers by fuel shortage.

When these elements reached Périers south-west of Carentan late on 11 June, they met up with the much weakened Fallschirmjäger Regiment 6, which had withdrawn from Carentan under pressure from the US 101st Airborne Division. The paratroopers of FJR 6 were placed under the command of *Götz von Berlichingen*; there was considerable animosity between FJR 6's Oberst von der Heydte and the 17. Division's SS-Oberf Ostendorff (who would try unsuccessfully to have Von der Heydte court-martialled). Short of ammunition, and without the promised air support, Ostendorff launched an

OPPOSITE **Werner Ostendorff, seen here as an SS-Standartenführer, led the *Götz von Berlichingen* Division until he was seriously wounded during the fighting south of Carentan in Normandy in June 1944.**

The divisional cuffband – the only known title worn in this formation – was produced only in BeVo machine-woven format.

7 Gottfried or Götz von Berlichingen (1480–1562) was a Württemberg knight whose violent and colourful career included most German internal and external wars of his lifetime, as well as simple banditry; from 1505 he wore an iron right hand to replace that shot off at the siege of Landshut that year.

attack on Carentan on 13 June, headed by SS-PzGren Regt 37 and the StuG IV assault guns of the Panzer Abteilung, supported by the attached paratroopers. Boggy and restricted terrain slowed the advance; the US paratroopers resisted stoutly, and after some hours received tank support from 2nd Armored Division. The attack failed with SS losses of some 460 men and 20 assault guns.

Fighting continued south of Carentan, and by the end of June casualties would climb to just over 1,000, including SS-Oberf Ostendorff wounded; replacements included low-quality drafts from two 'East battalions'. In early and mid-July, Regt 37 suffered particularly heavy losses. By 25 July, Operation 'Cobra' – the US armoured break-out from the Normandy beachhead, west of St Lô – found the division's capability rated only '4th Class'. Pulling out from a threatened encirclement in the Roncey area on 28–31 July, the remnants of both 2. SS-Pz Div *Das Reich* and *Götz von Berlichingen* were trapped on narrow roads by Allied fighter-bombers and US armour; the division lost its last assault guns and hundreds of men.

On 1 August the infantry survivors were retitled as a battlegroup, under SS-Ostubaf Jakob Fick. Grouped with the *Das Reich*, it was allocated to the doomed Avranches counter-offensive of 7 August; and on the 24th of the month it was disbanded after falling back to the Seine. On 15 August the other remnants were ordered to the Saarland, for rebuilding near Metz. There the infantry regiments received the remnants of the so-called 49. & 51. SS-Panzer Brigades – in truth, ex-coastal defence troops from Denmark; some 50 junior officers arrived straight from the Metz academy.

Götz von Berlichingen were under XIII SS-Panzer Korps in the second half of September, holding off US attacks around Dornot south of Metz, where the Americans had established bridgeheads over the River Moselle. In that month the division lost yet another commander, SS-Staf Diesenhofer being listed missing in action. Despite stiff resistance the bridgeheads were slowly expanded; the division was then committed to the defence of Metz itself during October, fighting dispersed in various sectors. On 7 November the division was ordered out of Metz; but two days later a major American assault was launched, which virtually destroyed the defenders, including SS-PzGren Regiment 38.

A GI examining one of the StuG IV assault guns of the *Götz von Berlichingen*'s SS-Panzer Abteilung 17, knocked out on the road from Périers to Carentan during the attempt to retake the latter town from the US 101st Airborne Division on 13 June 1944. This action – which cost the 17. Division more than 450 casualties – would be recreated for an episode of the television drama series *Band of Brothers*. By the time of the D-Day landings the division had a paper strength of about 17,000 men, but was short of transport and of experienced officers and NCOs. Such shortages – common throughout the Wehrmacht in 1944 – contributed to the division's failures in Normandy. (NARA)

During December the rest of the division, with a combat strength of about 3,500 and 20 armoured vehicles, retreated towards Saarbrücken and the West Wall defences. There *Götz von Berlichingen* received drafts of East European Volksdeutsche, but also a strong SS-PzGren Lehr Regt from the Prosetschnitz school. Additional reinforcements included a company of excellent PzKw V Panthers from the Army's 21. Pz Div, and even a handful of colossal Jagdtiger self-propelled guns.

On the last day of 1944 the division, under XIII SS-Korps south of Zweibrücken, took part in Operation *'Nordwind'* – an attack in southern Alsace, which the Germans hoped had been stripped of American troops rushed north to stem the Ardennes offensive. The 17. Division's initial

attack was against elements of the US 44th & 100th Infantry Divisions; at a feature known as Schlietzen Hill the inexperience of the rebuilt battalions caused heavy casualties. The offensive made little progress; on 6 January 1945 the division began to withdraw towards Lothringen, and on the 9th the latest commander, SS-Staf Linger, was taken prisoner and an Army colonel had to take temporary command.

In February and March 1945 the division fought in the West Wall around Rimlingen. US troops broke through on 18 March, forcing *Götz von Berlichingen* on to the retreat once again. On 22 March it abandoned its vehicles and withdrew across the Rhine; on the same day yet another divisional commander – SS-Staf Fritz Klingenberg – was listed as missing, believed killed. In early April the division was resisting the US 63rd & 100th Infantry and 10th Armored Divisions on the Jagst and Kocher rivers; by 21 April it was fighting in the hopeless defence of Nürnberg. Retreating southwards via Munich, *Götz von Berlichingen* eventually crossed the Danube, and the remnants surrendered to US troops near the Achensee on 7 May 1945.

SS-Untersturmführer Walter Ott from SS-Pz Abt 17; note the clearly visible 'Götz von Berlichingen' divisional cuffband. Although this unit was in fact equipped with assault guns rather than tanks (as was commonplace in the 'tank' battalions of Panzergrenadier divisions by 1944), he still wears the black uniform for tank crews, complete with officer's silver piping round the collar edge; and from the tone the piping on his *Schirmmütze* seems to be in Panzer pink rather than regulation white. Also of interest are the machine-woven death's-head and hand-embroidered eagle worn on his cap in place of the standard metal insignia.

Götz von Berlichingen was the only Waffen-SS division to spend its entire combat career on the Western Front rather than being exposed to the brutalizing conditions of Russia, and its reputation was relatively unsullied by allegations of atrocity. Ironically, there is some evidence that troops from this division themselves became victims of war crimes: the remains of about 200 of its men, apparently shot by Allied troops and buried in a mass grave, were discovered in the mid-1970s.

Four members of the division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Cuffband

A divisional title in BeVo machine-woven Latin script was worn.

18. SS-FREIWILLIGEN PANZER-GRENADIER DIVISION *HORST WESSEL*

Designation

January 1944–May 1945 18. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Division *Horst Wessel*[8]

Commanders

Jan 1944–Jan 1945 SS-Oberführer Wilhelm Trabandt; *Jan 1945* SS-Gruppenführer Josef Fitzthum; *Jan–Mar 1945* SS-Oberführer Georg Bochmann; *Apr–May 1945* SS-Standartenführer Heinrich Petersen

8 Horst Wessel (1907–30) was an SA officer killed in uncertain circumstances, who was posthumously hailed as a hero 'martyred' by Communist assassins. He was the writer of the SA marching song '*Die Fahne hoch!*'

SS-Brigadeführer August-Wilhelm Trabandt, seen here as an SS-Standartenführer, commanded the *Horst Wessel* Division from January 1944 to January 1945. Trabandt fell into Soviet captivity and was held as a prisoner of war until 1954.

Insignia of the *Horst Wessel* Division. The regulation SS-runes collar patch was almost universal throughout the division, but the alternative SA 'Kampfrune' patch was definitely worn by a few personnel. Two variants are known of the divisional cuffband: (top) in BeVo weave, and (bottom) in the so-called 'BeVo-like' variant machine-woven style.

Principal elements (spring 1944)

SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 39; SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 40[9]; SS-Panzer Abteilung 18 (assault guns); SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 18; SS-Artillerie Regiment 18; SS-Flak Abteilung 18; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 18; SS-Pionier Bataillon 18

Campaigns

By 1943 many of the personnel of 1. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) were Volksdeutsche – foreign-born ethnic Germans. In December 1943, when it was serving as part of XXXV Korps, 9. Armee, it was decided to use the brigade as the nucleus for a new Panzergrenadier division.

Hitler wanted this to be formed with volunteers from the *Sturmabteilungen* or SA and to be named after the SA 'martyr' Horst Wessel. While the title was adopted, and (to a limited extent) the SA's *Kampfrune* symbol, the actual recruits would include very few SA men, among whom volunteers for military service were already channelled to certain Wehrmacht units. Given the extreme hostility between the SA and SS following the latter's bloody purge of the former on 30 June 1934, it is unsurprising that there should have been little enthusiasm among SA men for joining the SS, or among SS men for displaying the SA emblem.

An alternative source of manpower was the ethnic Germans of Hungary. As an ally, from February 1943 Himmler had persuaded the regime of the Regent, Admiral Horthy, that Volksdeutsche be permitted to volunteer for the Waffen-SS; more than 50,000 such volunteers would ultimately serve with the *Prinz Eugen, Nordland, Reichsführer-SS* and *Florian Geyer* divisions. From April 1944 voluntary service was replaced by actual conscription, making nonsense of the new 18. Division's 'Freiwilligen' title. The division was formed and trained in separated locations in northern Croatia and Hungary, its staff and non-infantry units being based on those from 1. SS-Inf Bde (mot.), with assault guns from the *Nord* Division.

Completion of the *Horst Wessel* on paper would not be achieved until November 1944, but detachments would see combat much earlier. In the second half of March units from the division were deployed in Hungary together with *Florian Geyer* and *Reichsführer-SS* during Operation *'Margarethe'*, as insurance against the wavering of the Horthy regime. Some elements were detached for anti-partisan duty in Croatia in April–June 1944.

During the crisis of summer 1944 following the Soviet breakthrough against Army Group Centre, a divisional battlegroup built around SS-PzGren Regt 40 was sent to Galicia, and in July this Kampfgruppe Schäfer helped free a number of German divisions from the 'Brody Pocket'. In August the Kampfgruppe fought south of Lvov; it suffered heavy casualties in combat against both the Red Army and partisans, and had to be reinforced temporarily with a French battalion from SS-Sturmbrigade *Frankreich*. A battalion group, apparently from this Kampfgruppe, also took part in the suppression of the Slovak uprising at the end of August.

(continued on page 33)

9 Note that due to administrative muddle, no W-SS regiment numbered '41' was ever raised; the 19. Div's senior regiment was numbered '42'.

NORDLAND DIVISION, RUSSIAN FRONT, 1944–45

1: SS-Untersturmführer, SS-Pz Art Regt 11

2: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-PzGren Regt 24 *Danmark*

3: SS-Rottenführer, SS-Pz Abt (StuG) 11 *Hermann von Salza*

A

FRANCE, 1944

1: SS-Unterscharführer, 12. SS-Pz Div *Hitlerjugend*

2: SS-Kanonier, SS-Sturmgeschütz Abt 12

3: SS-Rottenführer,
17. SS-PzGren Div *Götz von Berlichingen*

B

HANDSCHAR DIVISION, BALKANS, 1944–45

1: Waffen-Untersturmführer
2: Waffen-Gebirgsjäger
3: SS-Hauptsturmführer

UKRAINIAN & LATVIAN VOLUNTEERS

1: Waffen-Grenadier, 14. W Gren Div der SS, summer 1944

2: Waffen-Sturmbannführer, 15. W Gren Div der SS, late 1944

3: SS-Schütze, 15. Lettische SS-Frw Div, autumn 1943

4: Waffen-Untersturmführer, 14. W Gren Div der SS, 1944–45

D

REICHSFÜHRER-SS & *HORST WESSEL* DIVISIONS, 1944–45

1: **SS-Unterscharführer, 18. SS-PzGren Div *Horst Wessel*; Poland, summer 1944**

2: **SS-Panzergrenadier, 16. SS-PzGren Div *Reichsführer-SS*; Italy, summer 1944**

3: **SS-Gruppenführer, 16. SS-PzGren Div *Reichsführer-SS*, summer 1944**

1

2

3

LATVIAN & ESTONIAN VOLUNTEERS

1: Waffen-Sturmmann,
19. W Gren Div der SS, winter 1944–45

2: Waffen-Hauptsturmführer,
W Gren Regt der SS 45, March 1944

3: Waffen-Scharführer,
20. W Gren Div der SS, autumn 1944

2

1

3

F

EASTERN VOLUNTEERS

1: Waffen-Sturmbannführer, 21. W Geb Div der SS *Skanderbeg*, summer 1944

2: SS-Oberscharführer, 22. SS-Frw Kav Div, spring 1944

3: Waffen-Gebirgsjäger, projected 23. W Geb Div der SS *Kama*, summer 1944

G

DUTCH VOLUNTEERS

1: **Legions-Schütze, Frw Legion Niederlande, 1941–42**

2: **Legions-Unterscharführer, Frw Legion Niederlande, spring 1943**

3: **SS-Oberschütze, 23. SS-Frw PzGren Div *Nederland*, 1944–45**

4: **SS-Sturmmann, 23. SS-Frw PzGren Div *Nederland*, 1945**

H

During November 1944 the rest of the division was transferred to Hungary, under LVII Panzer Korps, 6. Armee. It was heavily engaged in the fighting around Budapest, and in December the battlegroup from Galicia rejoined it. At the end of the year *Horst Wessel* became part of Panzerkorps Felderrnhalle of 8. Armee; it escaped encirclement, moving east and north via Jaszbereny into Slovakia and Moravia. Here it carried out anti-partisan operations while briefly refitting in February 1945. In March the division was fighting in south-east Silesia under Army Group Schörner; encircled in a tiny pocket at Oberglogau, it managed to fight its way out and reach German lines nearly 15 miles west.

After a brief rest the remnants were withdrawn to Neustadt. *Horst Wessel's* last battlegroup fought around Breslau under 17. Armee in April; they finally surrendered to the Red Army near Hirschberg on 8 May, only a handful of escapees managing to reach American captivity.

Five members of the division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

A blurred but intriguing photograph of an SS-Sturmmann of the 18. Division, taken during operations around Budapest in November–December 1944. The Crimea shoulder shield award identifies him as a member of the division's German cadre rather than a recently enlisted Hungarian Volksdeutsche. The tone and contrast make it difficult to be positive, but he certainly seems to wear a black armoured crew uniform, perhaps with pink Waffenfarbe piping around the collar. This would identify either an assault gun crewman of SS-Panzer Abteilung 18, or a tank destroyer crewman from the Panzerjäger battalion. The small badge on the left side of his cap is unidentified: it is the right size for an SA stick-pin, but this is pure guesswork.

Special insignia

Collar patches

The standard SS-runes collar patch was predominantly worn; but a special patch showing the SA 'Kampfrune' was also made, and there is anecdotal evidence from survivors that it was indeed worn, albeit in very small numbers.

Cuffband

A cuffband bearing the divisional title in Latin script was authorized, and photographs confirm that it was issued and worn, manufactured in both BeVo machine-weave and in a variant machine-woven style.

19. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (lettische Nr.2)

Designations

May 1943	Lettische SS-Freiwilligen Brigade
October 1943	2. Lettische SS-Freiwilligen Brigade
January 1944	19. Lettische SS-Freiwilligen Division
May 1944	19. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (lettische Nr.2)

Commanders

Sept 1943–Mar 1944 SS-Oberführer Hinrich Schuldt; *Mar–Apr 1944* SS-Standartenführer Friedrich-Wilhelm Bock; *Apr–May 1944* SS-Oberführer Bruno Streckenbach; *May 1944* Waffen-Oberführer Arturs Silgailis; *May 1944–May 1945* SS-Gruppenführer Bruno Streckenbach

Waffen-Obersturmbannführer Nikolajs Galdins, one-time commander of W Gren Regt 42 *Voldemars Veiss* in the Latvian 19. Division. Note the 'fire cross' collar patch and Latvian sleeve shield. Already awarded the Infantry Assault Badge and Close Combat Clasp, both classes of Iron Cross and the German Cross in Gold, Galdins was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 25 January 1945 while the division was fighting in the Kurland Pocket. (Josef Charita)

Principal elements (1944–45)[10]

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 42 *Voldemars Veiss* (lettisches Nr.1); Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 43 *Hinrich Schuldt* (lett. Nr.2); Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 44 (lett. Nr.6); Lett. SS-Fusilier Bataillon 19; SS-Waffen Panzerjäger Abteilung 19; Waffen Artillerie Regiment der SS 19; SS-Flak Abteilung 19; SS-Waffen Pionier Bataillon 19

Campaigns

This, the second SS division to be raised from Latvian volunteers, was built around a nucleus from the 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.). Four Latvian police ('Schuma') battalions had been sent to the northern Russian Front between October 1941 and November 1942; two served with the German Army, but the 19th and 21st Bns with that SS brigade. In late January 1943, Himmler ordered that this be rebuilt as a Latvian brigade within the 'Latvian SS Volunteer Legion' (see 15. Division, above). Since the brigade was in the front line and could not be spared for systematic conversion in a rear area, this process was lengthy and difficult.

In February 1943 the 21st, 19th and 16th Schuma Bns gathered at Krasnoye Selo, renamed as I, II & III Btl/Lettische Legion. New recruits were added; and in late March part of the unit was rushed prematurely to the front to fill a gap near Pulkovo. In May–June three more Schuma battalions were absorbed (24th, 26th, 18th), and the 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.) was officially retitled Lettische SS-Frw Brigade, adding the number '2.' in October. The organization of the brigade continued during May–December 1943 while it held a relatively quiet sector on the River Volkhov under XXXVIII Korps.

In January 1944 the brigade's up-rating into the 19th Latvian SS Volunteer Division was announced, but this enlargement would remain 'on paper' for months. The actual brigade – separated into Kampfgruppen Schuldt and Veiss, which included some German units – was fighting desperately against the Soviet offensive which broke the siege of Leningrad. This fighting withdrawal from the Volkhov river to the 'Panther-Stellung' on the Velikaya was complete by late February; here the division joined its sister formation, the 15., under VI (Lettisches) SS-Freiwilligen Korps. Renewed Soviet assaults on the Velikaya line were held off or contained in fierce fighting in March–April 1944. The division distinguished itself, but at heavy cost: on 15 March the commander, SS-Oberf Hinrich Schuldt, was among those killed; and on 7 April the second-in-command, Legions-Staf Voldemars Veiss, was mortally wounded. (In February 1944 Veiss had become the first Latvian Knight's Cross holder; his remarkable combat leadership was inspired by having lost 16 members of his family to the Soviet occupiers).

10 The successive changes in unit titles and numbering were extremely complex; see Bender & Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization & History of the Waffen-SS*, Vol.5, pp.101–105. The two senior infantry regiments received the honour titles 'Voldemars Veiss' and 'Hinrich Schuldt' on 15 Jan 1945.

Waffen-Obersturmführer Robert Ancans was awarded the Knight's Cross as the commander of a close combat training school with the Feldersatzbataillon of 19. Waffen Grenadier Division, which from August 1944 was upgraded from a replacement training unit to a combat battalion and redesignated SS-Fusilier Btl 19. On 21 September the battalion CO, Waffen-Hauptsturmführer Zanis Butkus, was also awarded the Knight's Cross. (Josef Charita)

Insignia of 19. Waffen Grenadier Division. The 'fire cross' was the officially authorized collar patch and was certainly widely worn, but many personnel wore the regular SS-runes.

Withdrawn in mid-April to the quieter Bardovo/Kudever region east of Opochka, the division's strong infantry (three regiments each of three battalions) was completed, though it was weak in artillery. In June–July 1944 the renewed Soviet offensive forced VI SS Volunteer Corps back into Latvia itself; by late July the division had been reduced to a battlegroup, which made a fighting retreat until it briefly checked the Red Army in the Lubana area at the end of July. Fierce fighting there in early August led to another withdrawal north of the Aviekste river; reinforcements were now drafted in from the withdrawn 15. Division. Further resistance on the line Cesvaine–Karzdaba lasted until 21 August, and in early September the Kampfgruppe was restored to divisional status.

From 25 September until 7 October the division held the 'Wenden-Stellung' positions around Nitaure and More; but on 13 October the Red Army captured Riga. The division, numbering just over 9,000 men, was pushed westwards into the Kurzeme region – the 'Kurland Pocket' – with the survivors of more than 30 other divisions. Here it remained trapped for the rest of the war, fighting in five major defensive battles in the Dobele sector under VI SS Korps as part of 16. Armee. Its units were around Saldus when Army Group Kurland surrendered on 8 May 1945.

Twelve members of the division received the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Collar patches

Although the SS-runes patch was widely worn, the 'fire cross' was the officially designated insignia for this division.

Arm shield

A shield in Latvian colours was worn on the left sleeve, in many variant forms (see under 15. Division above).

20. WAFFEN GRENADIER DIVISION DER SS (estnische Nr.1)

Designations

October 1942	Estnische SS-Legion
May 1943	Estnische SS-Freiwilligen Brigade
October 1943	3. Estnische SS-Freiwilligen Brigade
January 1944	20. Estnische SS-Freiwilligen Division
May 1944	20. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS (estnische Nr.1)

Commanders

Jan 1944–Mar 1945 SS-Brigadeführer Franz Augsberger; *Mar–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Berthold Maack

Principal elements (September 1944)[11]

Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 45 (estnisches Nr.1); Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 46 (est. Nr.2); Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 47 (est. Nr.3); Waffen Fusilier Bataillon der SS 20; SS-Waffen

11 For the complex history of unit composition, titles and numbers, other units absorbed or attached, and associated Kampfgruppen, see Bender & Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization & History of the Waffen-SS*, Vol V, pp.195–204.

Panzerjäger Abteilung 20; Waffen Artillerie Regiment der SS 20; SS-Waffen Pionier Bataillon 20

Campaigns

Like her neighbour Latvia, Estonia enjoyed only a brief interwar independence before being forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in June 1940. After a year of Soviet persecution Estonians saw the German invasion of June–August 1941 as a liberation, and it was enthusiastically aided by local guerrillas. Enough Estonians came forward in 1941–43 to allow the raising of three 'East Battalions' to serve with the Wehrmacht, and the SS & Police authorities raised 11 'Schuma' auxiliary battalions. Astutely, on the first anniversary of the German liberation of the capital, Tallinn, a call was made for volunteers to serve against the common enemy in an Estonian SS Legion. Many Estonian former soldiers preferred the German Army and were suspicious of the SS, but the formation of a three-battalion regimental group began at Debica (Heidelager) in Poland in November 1942.

Once trained, I Btl of the Legion was detached in April 1943 and sent to join the *Wiking* Division. This unit, renamed SS-Frw PzGren Btl *Narwa,* distinguished itself as III Btl of the *Westland* Regiment; it would not return to the Estonian formation until July 1944 (when it formed the core of the new Fusilier or infantry reconnaissance battalion).

Conscription from February 1943, and drafts from 1. SS-Inf Bde (mot.), increased the strength of the Legion to just over 5,000 by that September; but in May it had already been ordered expanded to a two-regiment brigade. In October the incomplete 3rd Estonian SS Volunteer Brigade was sent to fight partisans in the Nevel area. In December the brigade went into the 16. Armee's front line at Staraya Russa, and in January 1944 they were driven back by the Red Army's northern offensive. Meanwhile, the brigade's official expansion to a division had been ordered on 24 January 1944. In practice this process, carried out while the brigade was in the front line, took until April 1944 to complete even nominally; it required ever more searching conscription, and the German Army's Estonian 658th–660th 'East Battalions' were transferred en bloc into the new SS division.

Red Army pressure on the Narva defences on the old Estonian/Russian frontier threatened the horrific prospect of renewed Soviet occupation, and Estonian enlistments increased sharply (at this time six border guard regiments were also raised). Between February and August 1944 the understrength division put up a stubborn resistance against huge odds on this narrow front, between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Peipus. Army Detachment Narva (formerly LIV Korps) also included the 11. SS-Division *Nordland* and 4. SS-Brigade *Nederland*; they would be joined in August by the Belgian 5. *Wallonien* and 6. *Langemarck* brigades. The Estonians held

One of the most famous combat officers of the Baltic SS units was Waffen-Sturmbannführer Alfons Rebane. Rebane was awarded the Knight's Cross on 23 February as a major commanding the Estonian Volunteer Bn 658 of the German Army, before it was drafted into the Waffen-SS. He added the Oakleaves as a Waffen-Standartenführer, commander of W Gren Regt 46 and deputy divisional commander of 20. Waffen Grenadier Division. Rebane was thus (with Léon Degrelle of *Wallonien*) one of only two non-Germans to be awarded the Oakleaves. The print is dark, but he can be seen to wear the second, German-made collar patch showing an 'E' and sword only. The diagonally striped light blue, black and white arm shield, with a three-point top edge, is the type authorized in July 1944 for Estonians serving with the Army and Luftwaffe. (Josef Charita)

Insignia of the 20. Waffen Grenadier Division. The collar patch is the third pattern, the second German-made type, which reproduced in machine embroidery the design of the first Estonian-made 'Tartu' emblem, and replaced the unpopular 'E and sword'. (Below) early and late patterns of the Estonian arm shield, both worn by men of the 20. Division. The first, diagonally striped in light blue, black and white and bearing yellow lions and border, was initially associated with Estonian Schuma/Police units; the second is the final Waffen-SS style with horizontal stripes and a broad black border.

a front north of Narva city until Soviet advances to the south of them obliged a withdrawal westwards in August, followed by confused fighting in dispersed battlegroups. These fought around Tartu on the Emajogi river in southern Estonia in September, but on the 23rd, with the capital Tallinn lost, all German forces were ordered to retreat into Latvia.

The much weakened 20. Division was withdrawn to Germany, and in October–November 1944 was rested at Neuhammer in Silesia, where it was hastily rebuilt with men from the Estonian border guard regiments. In mid-January 1945 the renewed Soviet offensive crossed the Vistula and reached the Oder a week later. The division spent the rest of the war under 17. Armee and 1. Panzer Armee of Army Group Centre. Despite the loss of their homeland they fought well on the Oder front, where divisional units including Regt 45 formed one battlegroup; another, Kampfgruppe Rehfeldt, included Regt 47 and units originally left behind at Neuhammer.

In mid-March 1945 a break-out from encirclement in the 'Oppeln-Neisse Pocket' cost further heavy losses, including the divisional commander. By the time they surrendered to the Red Army on 8 May, the survivors had been forced south-west all the way to Melnik north of Prague. As former 'citizens of the USSR' their fate at Soviet hands, like that of captured Latvians, was extremely cruel.

Four of the division's soldiers were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Collar patches

The Estonian Legion were authorized blank right collar patches; some personnel adopted the SS-runes; but special patches for the division later existed in three forms, at least two of which were widely used. The first, made by the town of Tartu and given to men of Regt 45 in February 1944, later spread into other units; this featured an armoured arm holding a sword, with a curved letter 'E' (for Eesti – Estonia) in the crook. The second pattern, designed by the Waffen-SS and issued from June 1944 to replace the privately acquired type, showed a large machine-embroidered curved 'E' with a sword superimposed at a diagonal. This was highly unpopular; and photographs of a third, German-made pattern, reportedly authorized by Himmler in response to complaints and issued while the division was being rebuilt in winter 1944/45, show a machine-embroidered variant of the armoured arm, sword and 'E' emblem.

Arm shields

A number of patterns were used by Estonian personnel, of which three saw widespread use in Waffen-SS units. The style normally worn (on the upper right sleeve) by Estonians serving with the German Army and Luftwaffe showed three diagonal stripes, top right to bottom left, of light blue, black and white. A more elaborately shaped Schuma/Police version bore three golden-yellow lions, and had a yellow border. Both these are known to have been worn on the upper left sleeve by Estonians in the Waffen-SS, including the 'lions' pattern by SS-PzGren Btl *Narwa* of the 5. Division *Wiking*. In mid-1944 an SS-produced pattern was issued for wear on the upper left sleeve (see lower photograph on this page).

21. WAFFEN GEBIRGS DIVISION DER SS *SKANDERBEG* (albanische Nr.1)

Designation

April–October 1944 — 21. Waffen Gebirgs Division der SS *Skanderbeg* (albanische Nr.1)[12]

Commanders

Apr–June 1944 SS-Brigadeführer Josef Fitzhum; *June–Aug 1944* SS-Brigadeführer August Schmidhuber; *Aug–Oct 1944* SS-Obersturmbannführer Alfred Graaf

Principal elements (projected)

Waffen Gebirgsjäger Regiment der SS 50 & 51; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 21; Waffen Gebirgs Artillerie Regiment der SS 21; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 21; SS-Pionier Bataillon 21

Photographs of men identifiable as members of the 21. Waffen Grenadier Division *Skanderbeg* are of extreme rarity. These insignia were all produced during wartime. (Top) the collar patch depicting the goat-head crested helmet of George Castriota was certainly manufactured, but no evidence of its being worn has yet emerged. (Below) the Albanian national arm shield was photographed being worn by cadre personnel of the projected division; the black double-headed eagle on a red field has yellow eye details. (Right) the machine-woven 'BeVo-like' cuffband was also photographed in use by a German officer.

Formation

From 1939 until 1943 Albania was occupied by the Italians; but Communist partisans led by Enver Hoxha enjoyed virtual free rein in the countryside. When Italy surrendered in September 1943, Italian occupation troops in Albania surrendered to the partisans, and German troops immediately moved to occupy the country.

In April 1944 authority was given for the raising of a second Muslim SS division to combat the Communist partisans. Initial recruitment was from the ethnic Albanian population around Kosovo, and a nucleus from the *Handschar* Division was provided. Recruitment was slow, and many of those who came forward were judged unsuitable. By June the strength was only around 6,000; but troops were committed to Operation *'Draufgänger'* against Tito's partisans in Montenegro in July 1944. Following this, *Skanderbeg* was tasked with guarding the chromium mines near Kosovo; but within weeks the area had been overrun by partisans, and many Albanians deserted – a single regiment is reported to have lost over 1,000, and Heeresgruppe E claimed that the unit had absolutely 'no military value'. At the beginning of October 1944 its strength was listed as just over 4,900, of whom fewer than 1,500 (only a third of them Albanians) were fit for combat. In desperation, drafts of unemployed Kriegsmarine personnel were brought in to make up the numbers.

On 1 November 1944 the division was officially disbanded. Its cadre were transferred to the *Prinz Eugen* Division as Kampfgruppe *Skanderbeg*, and took part in that division's successful rearguard actions against Tito's partisans in December 1944–January 1945. Most of the former Navy men ended up in the 32. SS-Frw Gren Div *30 Januar*.

12 The name 'Skanderbeg' referred to 'Iskander Bey', the Turkish title of George Castriota (1403–68), a Serbian general in Turkish service; he married into the Albanian aristocracy, and became an Albanian national hero when he led a revolt against the Turks in the 1440s.

Special insignia

Collar patches

A collar patch was produced showing Castriota's goat-crested helmet, but there is no evidence of its ever being worn.

Cuffband

A cuffband with the inscription *'Skanderbeg'* in machine-woven form was issued and worn to a limited extent.

Arm shield

An Albanian national shield was produced, and worn to some extent; it showed a black double-headed eagle on a red field.

22. SS-FREIWILLIGEN KAVALLERIE DIVISION *MARIA THERESIA*

Designations

April 1944	22. SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division
September 1944	22. SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division *Maria Theresia*[13]

Commander

SS-Brigadeführer August Zehender

Principal elements (October 1944)

SS-Kavallerie Regiment 17; SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Regiment 52; SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Regiment 53; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 22 (1 co. Hetzers); SS-Freiwilligen Artillerie Regiment 22; SS-Flak Abteilung 22; SS-Aufklärungs Abteilung 22; SS-Pionier Abteilung 22

Campaigns

The creation of this division was authorized in December 1943. The nucleus was SS-Kav Regt 17, withdrawn as early as April 1943 from the 8. SS-Kav Div *Florian Geyer*. To this were added two newly raised 'volunteer' regiments of Hungarian Volksdeutsche, who thus made up about 70 per cent of the division. By August 1944, Regts 17 and 52 and some artillery were sent into the line in Romania. They fought around Arad, alongside Hungarian Army infantry, against greatly superior Soviet forces. Under the command of SS-Hstuf Anton Ameiser, 48 survivors from a Kampfgruppe of Regt 52 returned safely to German lines south of Budapest after three weeks – an exploit that earned Ameiser the Knight's Cross. In October the embryo division was reinforced by the arrival of SS-Frw Kav Regt 53; and in the same month, men from the newly titled *Maria Theresia* took part in the raid led by SS-Ostubaf Otto Skorzeny that captured the Hungarian head of state, Admiral Horthy, before he could carry out his plan of making a separate peace.

In November 1944 the *Maria Theresia* and *Florian Geyer* divisions were assigned to the 50,000-strong garrison of Budapest. During extremely heavy fighting on the eastern approaches to the city the division's counter-attacks forced the enemy back on a number of occasions. By the end of that month divisional strength was around 8,000 men; and early

SS-Standartenführer August Zehender. His 2nd and 1st Class Iron Crosses and Infantry Assault Badge were awarded for service in 1940 with the *Deutschland* Regiment of the *Das Reich* Division. He was wounded twice as a battalion commander with that division in 1941–42, and was decorated with the Knight's Cross in March 1943 as an SS-Obersturmbannführer commanding SS-Kav Regt 2 with the SS-Kavallerie Division (later 8. SS-Kav Div *Florian Geyer*). He added the Oakleaves as SS-Brigadeführer and commander of the 22. Division *Maria Theresia* on 4 February 1945, a week before his death in Budapest.

13 This largely Hungarian formation was named after the renowned Austro-Hungarian empress (r.1740–80)

in December *Maria Theresia* was withdrawn into Budapest itself (without its horses). It made a fighting withdrawal through Pest during most of the month, once again repelling Soviet probing attacks. On Christmas Day 1944 the division withdrew across the Danube into Buda, and by 19 January the German pocket in the city had been reduced to about one square kilometre. On 11 February the remnants of the division staged a desperate break-out attempt from their positions near Castle Hill, but were cut to pieces. Fewer than 200 men escaped of the two SS cavalry divisions combined.

Five members of the division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

SS-Sturmbannführer Anton 'Toni' Ameiser, awarded the Knight's Cross on 1 November 1944 as commander of SS-Frw Kav Regt 52 within the 22. Division, and portrayed wearing the sunflower collar patch. (Josef Charita)

Special insignia

Collar patches

A special collar patch showing a large embroidered sunflower motif was produced and worn.

23. WAFFEN GEBIRGS DIVISION DER SS *KAMA* (kroatische Nr.2)

Designation

June–October 1944 — 23. Waffen Gebirgs Division der SS *Kama* (kroatische Nr.2)

Commanders

July–Sept 1944 SS-Standartenführer Hellmut Raithel; *Sept–Oct 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Gustav Lombard

Principal elements (projected)

Waffen Gebirgsjäger Regiment der SS 55 & 56 (kroatisches Nr.3 & 4); SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 23; Waffen Gebirgs Artillerie Regiment der SS 23; SS-Aufklärungs Abteilung 23; SS-Pionier Bataillon 23

Formation

The raising of this second 'Croatian' anti-partisan division was ordered in June, but it never attained the status even of a single formed unit. Its manpower was to be Bosnian Muslim with a German cadre, and some 1,350 men from the *Handschar* Division provided a nucleus. In order to avoid interference by partisans while forming up, it was based in a part of Hungary predominantly occupied by ethnic Germans. However, *Kama* never received enough men to create any of its units, and the Bacska training area lay in the path of the Soviet advance. It became clear that the division would be unable to complete formation, and in September it was ordered disbanded. The troops on hand were reallocated, the cadre back to Kampfgruppe Hanke of the *Handschar* and others to the planned 31. SS-Frw Gren Div of Volksdeutsche.

The sunflower collar patch worn by members of 22. SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division *Maria Theresia*.

Special insignia

A collar patch bearing a 16-point sunburst emblem was manufactured, but there is no evidence for its being issued.

SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Scholz, who earned first the Knight's Cross and then the Oakleaves as a company and later battalion commander with SS-Frw Regt 49 (later *De Ruiter*) of the Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande. He rose to command this Dutch Volunteer Legion in February–May 1943, shortly before it was withdrawn from the front to be enlarged into 4. SS-Frw PzGren Bde *Nederland*.

23. SS-FREIWILLIGEN PANZER-GRENADIER DIVISION *NEDERLAND*

Designations

July 1943	4. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Brigade *Nederland*
February 1945	23. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Division *Nederland* (niederländische Nr.1)

Commanders

Dec 1941–July 1942 SS-Obersturmbannführer Arved Theuermann; *Feb–May 1943* SS-Obersturmbannführer Helmut Scholz; *May 1943–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Wagner

Principal elements (1945)

SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Regiment 48 *General Seyffardt*; SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Regiment 49 *De Ruiter*; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 23; SS-Artillerie Regiment 23; SS-Aufklärungs Abteilung 23; SS-Pionier Abteilung 23

Campaigns

Being considered a true 'Germanic' people, the Dutch were welcomed as volunteers in the Waffen-SS as early as spring 1941 (see Introduction above). A retired chief of staff of the Dutch armed forces, LtGen H.A.Seyffardt, was appointed to head the Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande. Recruitment was slow, especially among officers, but eventually three battalions were formed and despatched to the Leningrad sector of the Eastern Front in January 1942.

From March they served under 2. SS-Inf Bde (mot.), and earned a dependable reputation during the Wehrmacht's horrendous first winter in Russia. In March the unit was praised for successfully attacking Soviet bunker systems. In June they captured the village of Mal Sawoschye, with some 3,000 prisoners – among them Gen Andrei Vlassov, who later commanded an entire army of anti-Soviet volunteers. The Legion remained on the Leningrad front throughout 1942, fighting alongside the legions from Norway and Belgium as well as Latvian SS units. Back in Holland the Legion's commander, Gen Seyffardt, was assassinated by the Dutch Resistance in February 1943. In April 1943 the Legion was withdrawn from the front for upgrading to regimental status, but lost 1,700 men as cadre for the *Nordland* Division. In May the unit's title changed to SS-Frw PzGren Bde *Nederland*, later adding the number '4.'. In September the brigade was transferred to Croatia for anti-partisan duty; and in November its regiments received their honour titles.

In January 1944, about 5,500 strong, the brigade was back on the Leningrad sector of the Russian Front, just in time for the great Soviet breakthrough. Pushed back steadily westwards to the Narva line between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Peipus by the end of February, *Nederland* continued to fight with great spirit throughout the battles of the spring and summer. The brigade held on to its positions doggedly until the Soviet summer offensive of late June completely unhinged the whole Russian Front, and deep penetrations in Lithuania to the south

threatened to cut off the German forces in Latvia and Estonia. Under the massive attacks of late July the brigade made a brief stand at a feature called Orphanage Hill with elements of *Nordland* and *Langemarck*; two days later they were pushed back, after costing the Red Army more than 100 tanks, but *General Seyffardt* suffered huge casualties. During August, *De Ruiter* suffered the same fate; a few hundred replacements were received, but these were mostly former Kriegsmarine sailors of limited combat value. The brigade was pushed back ever further south-westwards through Estonia; and by October 1944 the exhausted remnant of *Nederland* was around Libau in Kurland.

In December the decision was taken to upgrade the brigade to divisional status, taking the vacant number of the disbanded *Kama*. The Dutch survivors were evacuated from the Kurland Pocket by sea to Stettin (with further heavy loss of life in the sinking of the transport ship *Moira*). After forming in Pomerania in January–February 1945, the 23. Division *Nederland*, with only about 2,200 combatants, was sent back into action around Stargard and Stettin. In the closing weeks of the war *Nederland* moved south along the Oder front and fought on the eastern approaches to Berlin, taking heavy casualties around Fürstenwalde. In early May survivors managed to surrender to US units near Magdeburg.

Twenty members of the division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

SS-Rottenführer Gerardus Mooymann, photographed after promotion and award of the first Knight's Cross to a foreign SS volunteer (and one of very few ever awarded to foreign enlisted men); in February 1943 this 19-year-old anti-tank gunner knocked out more than a dozen Soviet tanks in one day. Mooymann wears the 'Frw. Legion Niederlande' cuffband, below the arm shield diagonally striped in the Dutch national colours. He survived the war, but died in a motor accident in 1987. (Josef Charita)

Special insignia

Collar patches

The legion, brigade and division wore the runic 'Wolfsangel' emblem of the Dutch National Socialist Movement's armed sections or Weer Afdeelingen (NSB/WA) in two forms: one showed a small upright rune, and the second a larger horizontal version.

Cuffbands

Legion:

The Dutch volunteer legion was authorized a cuffband with the inscription *'Frw. Legion Nederland'* (mixed German/Dutch spelling); this was manufactured in machine-embroidered and flat-wire woven formats. A common German language variant had the alternative spelling *'Frw. Legion Niederlande'*.

Divisional:

A band bearing the title *'Nederland'* in Latin script was manufactured in BeVo-weave format for men not entitled to a unit cuffband.

Regimental:

'General Seyffardt' SS-Frw PzGren Regt 48's cufftitle was manufactured only in BeVo machine-woven format.

'De Ruiter' SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49 was named after the 17th century Dutch admiral Michael de Ruyter. The cufftitle, in German spelling, was manufactured only in a so-called 'BeVo-like' machine-woven form.

Although both bands were certainly manufactured, it is not clear to what degree, if any, they were actually worn.

Arm shields

Displays of the Dutch national colours of orange or red, white and blue appeared in several variations, some locally made and of fairly crude

construction. An early shallow rectangular patch bore pale colours in horizontal stripes. More common was a traditional shield shape with darker diagonal stripes; examples slanting in both directions are known. The official Waffen-SS shield showed horizontal stripes on a round-bottomed shield with a broad black border.

Insignia of 23. SS-PzGren Div *Nederland*. (Top) the vertical and horizontal versions of the Dutch 'Wolfsangel' rune. (Below) the 'BeVo-like' cuffband authorized late in the war for SS-Frw PzGren Regt 49 *De Ruiter*, and the BeVo-weave band for SS-Frw PzGren Regt 48 *General Seyffardt* – both certainly manufactured, but not confirmed as ever having been worn; and the BeVo-weave divisional *Nederland* cuffband.

THE PLATES

A: *NORDLAND* DIVISION, RUSSIAN FRONT, 1944–45

A1: SS-Untersturmführer, SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 11

This figure of a battery commander during the Narva battles of summer 1944 represents a typical company grade officer in the field. He wears an M1935 steel helmet, an M1941 all field-grey tunic, M1942 *Kielhose* trousers and short-shaft enlisted man's marching boots. On his right collar patch is the *Sonnenrad* emblem authorized for this division; his plain dull silver cord shoulder straps of rank have the red-over-black double underlay of the SS artillery; and on his left forearm is a cuffband with the divisional title. On his field belt he wears a Walther P38 semi-automatic pistol in a hard-shell holster, a map case and a water bottle; he uses 10x50 field binoculars.

A2: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 24 *Danmark*

This NCO is depicted during the rebuilding of the 1st Bn of this regiment, withdrawn from the front after suffering major casualties at Oranienberg and Narva early in 1944. He wears an M1943 'universal' field cap, M1941 field tunic, M1942 trousers, canvas anklets and ankle boots. (Photographs from the front lines show the usual range of camouflage clothing, including the camouflaged field cap and the smock in so-called 'palm tree pattern'.) The *Tresse* braid to the collar and shoulder straps of this and all senior NCO ranks is in subdued silver-grey rather than the bright aluminium used earlier. On the left sleeve is the standard SS eagle-and-swastika national insignia, the cuffband of his regiment, and the black-bordered Waffen-SS pattern arm shield in the Danish national colours. The Infantry Assault Badge and a Wound Badge are displayed on his left pocket. For training he has an MP40 sub-machine gun and light field equipment.

This SS-Obersturmbannführer wears the special arm shield for Finnish volunteers; a Finnisches Freiwilligen Bataillon der Waffen-SS formed III Btl of the original *Nordland* Regiment in the *Wiking* Division. Although it was apparently disbanded as a distinct unit in 1943 when the regiment was transferred to the 11. Division, individual Finns continued to serve in both divisions. (Josef Charita)

This close-up detail from a wartime propaganda newsreel shows the sleeve of a Finnish volunteer from *Nordland* undergoing officer training at the SS-Junkerschule at Bad Tölz in Bavaria. Note the training establishment cuffband worn above the unit cuffband, as well as the age-faded Finnish volunteer sleeve patch. (Josef Charita)

A3: SS-Rottenführer, SS-Panzer Abteilung (Sturmgeschütz) 11 *Hermann von Salza*

The *Nordland*, as a Panzergrenadier division, was entitled to a tank battalion; but in most such divisions by 1944 this was in fact equipped with self-propelled armoured assault guns. The crews of such vehicles were authorized the field-grey version of the 'special' vehicle uniform, for which there is photographic evidence from this unit. However, there is also a photograph clearly showing the battalion's cuffband being worn on the black tank uniform. Such apparent contradictions were common in both the Army and Waffen-SS in 1944–45; the over-particular regulation distinction between grey, red-piped uniforms for gun crews of Sturmgeschütz (assault artillery) units, and black, pink-piped uniforms for Panzerjäger (tank destroyer) units, clearly broke down in practice. Photos of members of this unit tend to show the SS-runes collar patch rather than the 'sun wheel'. There was also occasional use in *Hermann von Salza* of non-regulation pink piping to the collar patches (as there reportedly was, in red, on the field-grey vehicle uniform); this reminds us of *Nordland*'s initial close links with the *Wiking* Division, whose tank crews also wore pink-piped patches to some extent.

B: FRANCE, 1944

B1: SS-Unterscharführer, 12. SS-Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend*

One of the cadre of veteran NCOs from the 1. SS-Pz Div *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* wears typical field dress of the Normandy campaign. The reversible second pattern helmet cover and M1942 second pattern smock have slightly contrasting 'summer' sides exposed, the first in sharp-edged so-called 'oakleaf' and the second in 'burred edge' pattern. The trousers are those of the herringbone twill non-reversible 'pea' pattern uniform which appeared that year. Although special rank insignia of green bars and oak-leaves on black sleeve patches were supposed to be worn on any clothing which lacked shoulder straps, evidence for their use by enlisted ranks is sparse; this sergeant simply folds his tunic collar outside the smock to show his collar patches.

B2: SS-Kanonier, SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 12

An armoured assault gun battalion existed from time to time (a Panzerjäger unit, also listed in the original order of battle, never seems to have been completed). This young artillery private is reconstructed in autumn 1944, after survivors of the division's near annihilation in Normandy were given their cuffbands; photographic evidence suggests that it was only sparingly awarded. He wears the jacket of the field-grey 'special' uniform; his personally acquired trousers are made up from Italian Army camouflage material – quite widely seen in Normandy.

B3: SS-Rottenführer, 17. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Götz von Berlichingen*

This junior NCO of either SS-PzGren Regt 37 or 38 is represented as he might have appeared after the remaining Kampfgruppe of this division was pulled out to eastern France for refitting. Despite regulations, photographs show that the old M1940 *'Schiffschen'* field cap was often still worn alongside its 'universal' M1943 peaked replacement (even by the teenagers of the newly raised *Hitlerjugend*). The M1942 field tunic is worn with M1943 trousers and the canvas anklets and ankle boots which were by now standard issue. His insignia include the divisional cuffband, and he displays the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class, a Wound Badge, and the bronze-coloured Infantry Assault Badge as awarded to Panzergrenadiers.

C: *HANDSCHAR* DIVISION, BALKANS, 1944–45

C1: Waffen-Untersturmführer, autumn 1944

This junior officer's rank title and lack of SS-runes breast badge indicate that he is not a 'full' member of the SS, but rather one of the ethnic German cadre from Yugoslavia, Romania or Hungary. In typical everyday service dress, he wears a field-grey fez of relatively tall design, with the standard woven SS eagle and death's-head cap badges (the mountain troops' Edelweiss badge was not worn on the side of the fez). His tunic is the M1936 Army officer's style with dark green collar. The shoulder strap underlay is in mountain rifles' light green over SS black; the special divisional collar patch is the officer's model edged with silver twist cord; and the national shield below his left sleeve eagle is in the red and white chequers of Croatia. On the right sleeve is the SS mountain troops' Edelweiss patch.

C2: Waffen-Gebirgsjäger

This Bosnian Muslim enlisted man wears an M1942 first pattern camouflage smock over his M1943 field uniform, the collar patches the only visible insignia. The field-grey fez is one of the shorter models of the range of styles produced. He wears short puttees over mountain boots with heavily cleated soles. He is armed with the standard Kar98k rifle, and the light belt equipment is supported by a bread bag sling – Y-straps were not issued to SS mountain troops. His M1942 helmet has the SS decal reversed to the left side, as commonly seen in foreign volunteer units.

C3: SS-Hauptsturmführer

This German captain is one of the Reichsdeutsche cadre personnel; although he wears full divisional insignia, including the Croatian arm shield, his status as a full member of the SS is shown by the embroidered *Sigrunen* patch below his left pocket. The red version of the fez was

intended for dress rather than field wear; the mountain trousers and boots are worn with 'Styrian' gaiters. His Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class, Infantry Assault Badge and Close Combat Clasp were probably earned with the 7. Division *Prinz Eugen* before his transfer to *Handschar*.

D: UKRAINIAN & LATVIAN VOLUNTEERS

D1: Waffen-Grenadier, 14. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS, summer 1944

This fresh recruit to the '1st Galician' (actually, Ukrainian) division is depicted as if during its rebuilding after being nearly destroyed in the Brody Pocket. He wears an M1942 helmet with reversed decal, and M1942 field tunic. On his right collar patch is the rampant lion emblem of Galicia. On his left sleeve is the yellow and blue shield with the Galician arms; at least one published photo also shows this worn on the right sleeve. The leather belt has the standard Waffen-SS enlisted ranks' buckle.

D2: Waffen-Sturmbannführer, 15. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS, late 1944

This Latvian major wears officers' M1936 style uniform with the peaked service cap; the white-over-black shoulder strap underlay identifies the infantry branch, but white cap piping was regulation for all branches for much of the war. On his right collar is the sun-and-stars motif, which in autumn 1944 replaced the 'fire cross' swastika worn earlier. In photographs the arm shield in Latvian colours appears in several shapes and styles and on either sleeve. This type seems to date from Latvian units serving with the Army in 1942, but photos also show it worn by SS troops either on the upper right sleeve or the left forearm.

D3: SS-Schütze, 15. Lettische SS-Freiwilligen Division, autumn 1943

This earlier Latvian volunteer wears the M1940 field cap and M1943 tunic. Despite the authorization in March 1943 of the large 'static swastika' collar patch for the Latvian Legion, and thus for the division formed from it (confirmed by an order of June 1944), photographs show the SS-runes in widespread use. This common variant of the Latvian arm shield was ordered in this position in September 1943 and officially worn here until moved to the left upper sleeve in April 1944 (though regulations were probably often disregarded in the front lines).

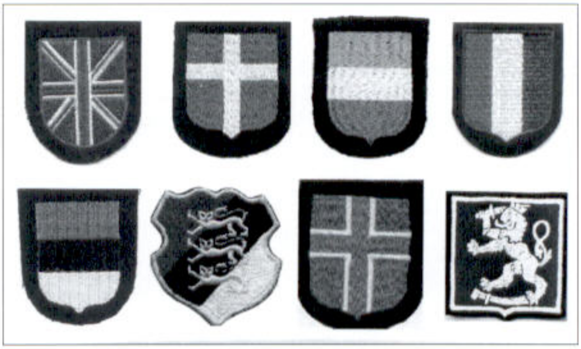
D4: Waffen-Untersturmführer, 14. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS, 1944–45

This Ukrainian second lieutenant of infantry wears the standard peaked service cap and an M1941 tunic modified to officer quality, with added dark green collar facing. He still wears the Galician arm shield on his upper left sleeve; but on his right collar, instead of the Galician lion or SS-runes, is a rare example of the Ukrainian 'Trident of Vladimir' emblem, now known to have been worn in some instances.

E: *REICHSFÜHRER-SS* & *HORST WESSEL* DIVISIONS, 1944–45

E1: SS-Unterscharführer, 18. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Horst Wessel*; Poland, summer 1944

This junior NCO of mechanized infantry – probably a Volksdeutsche conscript from Hungary – is a member of Kampfgruppe Schäfer, the battlegroup formed around SS-PzGren Regt 40 which saw heavy combat against the



National arm shields worn by troops who came – albeit sometimes in very small numbers and briefly – under command of the truly multinational *Nordland* Division. (Top row, left to right) Great Britain – a post-war copy of the confirmed arm shield of the British Free Corps, a handful of whose members were briefly attached to SS-Pz Aufkl Abt 11 in March 1945; Denmark – white on red; Holland – red over white over blue; France – blue, white and red; (bottom row) Estonia – two different patterns in light blue, black and white, one with yellow lions and border; Norway – red with white-edged blue cross; Finland – white on black.

Red Army near Lvov in July 1944. His M1942 helmet has the bread bag sling arranged around it to hold camouflage; the M1943 tunic and M1942 trousers are worn with canvas anklets and ankle boots. Apart from his Kar98k and a couple of M1939 'egg' grenades, he carries a Panzerfaust 30 anti-tank rocket; and the award on his right sleeve confirms that he has destroyed an enemy tank with a hand-held weapon. Although the great majority of the division wore the SS-runes collar patch, it is now confirmed that the SA-rune patch was also worn, if in very small numbers.

E2: SS-Panzergrenadier, 16. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Reichsführer-SS*; Italy, summer 1944

Most of this division spent 1944 in Corsica and Italy, and its personnel were issued with Waffen-SS pattern tropical clothing. The tunic was based on the Italian 'Sahariana' style with the shoulder yoke forming the flaps for the breast pockets; this is a later pattern with unpleated pockets. The extent to which insignia were worn on this uniform varied; here shoulder straps, a sleeve eagle machine-woven in tan on black, and the divisional cuffband are attached, but not collar patches – a fairly typical combination. His M1935 helmet is camouflaged with dark yellow vehicle paint; he wears light field equipment for a rifleman, with an M1924 'stick' grenade thrust under his belt.

E3: SS-Gruppenführer, 16. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Reichsführer-SS*, summer 1944

This figure is based upon photos of SS-Gruf Max Simon, the divisional commander until the end of October 1944, in everyday service dress. The general officers' service cap has silver-coloured piping, cords and metal insignia. The typical officers' quality M1936-style tunic with dark green collar is worn with plain breeches and jackboots. Collar patches and sleeve eagle are finely hand-embroidered in aluminium wire thread; but the divisional cufftitle is a basic machine-woven style for all ranks, in pale grey rayon

An interesting photograph of SS-Brigadeführer Karl Sauberzweig decorating members of his *Handschar* Division; note that he wears the conical 'third type' field-grey fez, which is also worn by a divisional junior officer in the left background. Sauberzweig and a figure in the central background can both be seen to wear the Edelweiss sleeve patch of SS mountain troops; the photo cannot be much later than 21 June 1944, when Sauberzweig was promoted SS-Gruppenführer. (Private collection)

lettering on black. The general officers' interwoven gold and silver cord shoulder straps on dove-grey underlay have the single silver pip of this lieutenant-general grade. His decorations include the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves, Iron Cross 1st Class, Infantry Assault Badge and a Wound Badge. The Demjansk Shield on Simon's left shoulder was earned during his earlier service with the *Totenkopf* Division, when he led that formation in the Demjansk Pocket. Obscured from this angle is Simon's silver and black *Ehrenwinkel* or 'old campaigner's chevron', worn on the upper right sleeve by all SS men who had joined the Party before 30 January 1933 (see Plate G1).

F: LATVIAN & ESTONIAN VOLUNTEERS

F1: Waffen-Sturmmann, 19. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS, winter 1944–45

This Latvian MG42 'number one' wears an M1942 helmet camouflaged with whitewash, an M1943 field tunic, and the trousers from the M1943 padded winter suit, reversible from white to camouflage and here worn 'autumn' side out. He has been fortunate to acquire a pair of felt and leather winter boots and grey woollen gloves. On his belt are the tool and spares pouch and the holstered P38 which were standard issue for infantry machine gunners. The 'fire cross' collar patch, originally authorized for the Latvian Legion and briefly for the 15. W Gren Div, was assigned to this second Latvian division in autumn 1944. On the left sleeve is worn the final, Waffen-SS pattern arm shield.

F2: Waffen-Hauptsturmführer, Waffen Grenadier Regiment der SS 45, March 1944

This Estonian volunteer captain, a highly decorated company commander in the senior infantry regiment of the 20. W Gren Div der SS, wears service dress but has unholstered his P38 – the Germans' Baltic front was much harried by Soviet partisans. He displays the first pattern Estonian collar emblem – a white metal mailed arm, sword and 'E' – presented to the regiment by the Estonian town of Tartu in February 1944 and sewn onto their previously plain black right collar patches. The arm shield, with the national colours in diagonal stripes forming an elaborately shaped shield, bears three golden-yellow heraldic lions. Associated with the Estonian Schuma/Police battalions, it was also worn on either sleeve by some men serving with the German Army and Waffen-SS.

F3: Waffen-Scharführer, 20. Waffen Grenadier Division der SS, autumn 1944

This NCO wears the unpopular second pattern, German-made collar patch delivered without warning to W Gren Regt 45 in June 1944; it shows a large curved 'E' with a superimposed sword. On his left sleeve is the later, simplified Waffen-SS pattern Estonian arm shield with horizontal bars in the national colours in a black border. It is reported that some troops painted a shield in Estonian colours on the side of their helmets. That he still has 'marching boots' suggests that he is a veteran of the Wehrmacht since 1942.

G: EASTERN VOLUNTEERS

G1: Waffen-Sturmbannführer, 21. Waffen Gebirgs Division der SS *Skanderbeg*, summer 1944

This reconstruction shows a Reichsdeutsche member of the staff of this aborted division during the failed attempts to raise it. He wears the M1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze*, the crown piped in aluminium for officers, and with the SS mountain troops' Edelweiss side badge. The matching arm patch is worn on his right sleeve, and immediately below it the *Ehrenwinkel* of a pre-February 1933 member of the Nazi Party or SS (or for Austrians, pre-12 February 1938). This is taken – like the SS-rune collar patch, the Albanian arm shield and the 'Skanderbeg' cuffband – from photos of the CO of the divisional supply company.

G2: SS-Oberscharführer, 22. SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division, spring 1944

This Hungarian senior NCO of what would soon be named the *Maria Theresia* Division wears a casual field uniform plausible for training in the first half of 1944. The NCOs' peaked service cap is piped in cavalry yellow, as are the shoulder straps of his M1943 tunic; cloth-reinforced late

Waffen-Obersturmbannführer Harald Riipalu, the last commander of W Gren Regt 45 within the Estonian 20. Division. He clearly wears the first, white metal version of the collar emblem, presented to his unit in February 1944 by the grateful citizens of Tartu, and sewn on to the black patches at various angles. Another photo shows him with the final Waffen-SS version of the arm shield on his left upper sleeve; and the two small silver buttons at the rear of his cuffs which were common among former Estonian Army officers.

production riding breeches are worn with long riding boots. There is no evidence for the use of an arm shield; but on his right collar, enclosed by the usual silver-grey *Tresse* distinguishing NCO ranks from Unterscharführer upwards, is the embroidered sunflower emblem of this division. He carries an MP40, and his light belt kit is hooked to cavalry support straps.

G3: Waffen-Gebirgsjäger, projected 23. Waffen Gebirgs Division der SS *Kama*

One of the small number of mountain riflemen actually enlisted for this projected second Muslim mountain division, he wears the M1943 field tunic with plain patches on both collars. The special collar patch featuring a stylized 'sunburst' was designed and manufactured, but it is not thought that any were ever issued. The use of blank right hand patches was common in the early stages of several foreign volunteer units. Mountain trousers, Styrian gaiters and cleated mountain boots are worn, and conventional belt equipment is carried. This Kosovar recruit displays the rarest pattern of fez associated with the *Handschar* Division, also believed to have been worn within *Skanderbeg*; of conical shape, it follows the traditional Albanian form – the Kosovo area had a large population of ethnic Albanians.

H: DUTCH VOLUNTEERS

H1: Legions-Schütze, Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande, 1941–42

This private wears a greatcoat on which collar patches have been applied (although not used by the Army, collar patches on SS greatcoats were relatively common). The right patch shows the vertical version of the so-called 'wolf hook' rune.

On the left sleeve is the early Dutch national colours patch, worn just above the 'Legion Niederlande' (German spelling) cuffband – a rather crudely lettered, locally made example, which omits the 'Frw.' prefix.

H2: Legions-Unterscharführer, Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande, spring 1943

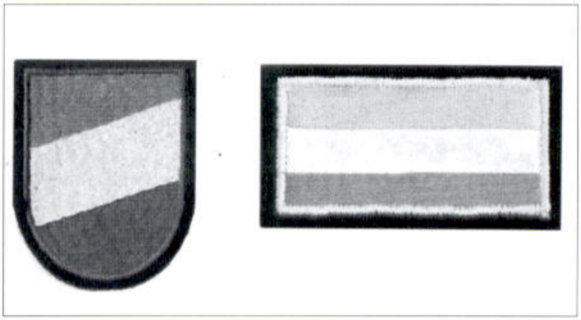
This junior NCO in walking-out dress wears the M1941 tunic and the peaked service cap for non-commissioned ranks, with white infantry piping. The SS-runes are worn on the collar, and the authorized cuffband 'Frw. Legion Nederland' (partial Dutch spelling) on the sleeve. At this date the Legion had been withdrawn from the front for enlargement into a brigade, but some Legion cufftitles were retained in 1943–44 after the redesignation as 4. SS-Frw PzGren Bde *Nederland*. Below the sleeve eagle is another variant of the Dutch colours, in shield form with the colour bands running diagonally top left to bottom right.

H3: SS-Oberschütze, 23. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Division *Nederland*, 1944–45

The M1940 field cap was still seen in the last year of the war. On the M1942 tunic this senior private displays the later horizontal form of *Wolfsangel*. Above the division's 'Nederland' cuffband is a German-made Dutch arm shield with stripes running from top right to bottom left.

H4: SS-Sturmmann, 23. SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Division *Nederland*, 1945

The M1943 'universal' field cap bears one-part insignia machine-embroidered on a trapezoid-shaped field-grey patch. The M1944 field uniform consists of a short blouse, and trousers with button-forward pocket flaps like those on the armoured crew uniforms. He displays the divisional cuffband with the final, Waffen-SS pattern Dutch arm shield. The black shoulder straps are piped artillery red, and he wears the Army Flak Battle Badge. A separate Flak Abteilung often disappeared from divisional orders of battle during 1944; there was a policy of gathering these as Corps assets, and some divisions seem to have retained only a Flak company, sometimes grouped with the Panzerjäger unit.



Two variants of the Dutch national colours arm insignia: the intermediate German-made type with deep red and royal blue stripes, and the early Dutch rectangular patch of orange, white and light blue.

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